

Composing Stories to Live By in Liminal Spaces: A Narrative Inquiry into the
Experiences of Individuals with Multiple Racial Heritages

By
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Abstract

This study narratively inquired into the composing of stories to live by—a narrative view of identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999)—of individuals with multiple racial heritages. Drawing upon the relational nature of narrative inquiry, and by attending to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of the personal and social, the temporal, and place or series of places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I came alongside three participants over a period of 18 months as they lived, told, retold, and relived stories of experiences as individuals with multiple racial heritages living within the United States. Research literature on identity development of persons with multiple racial heritages has focused on the path or paths taken toward racial identity resolution and the personal and social factors involved. This inquiry aimed to contribute to understanding the complexities that shape the composing of stories to live by of individuals with multiple racial heritages as they move between inside-of-school and outside-of-school contexts over time. This inquiry revealed five narrative threads, or plotlines; the composition of their stories to live by often took place within liminal spaces (Heilbrun, 1999) where they felt unsure about who they are and where they belong: (1) within familial narratives; (2) in spaces where race is constructed; (3) within school stories; (4) in spaces of invisibility; and (5) within intergenerational familial narrative. In each of these plotlines, as they negotiated the stories told about them by others, they struggled for narrative coherence as conceptualized by Carr (1986), as “a struggle with two aspects...one to live out or live up to a plan or narrative...the other to construct or choose that narrative” (p. 96).

Key terms: narrative inquiry, multiple racial heritages, stories to live by, liminality, narrative coherence, school stories, familial narratives

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Dedication

For the love of Omari

From its inception, this work has been an expression of my love for my grandson, Omari James YaDullah. He is a beautiful and unique individual who carries with him the multiplicities and complexities involved with having parents of different racial heritages. He is why I came to believe that this work was necessary and why I hope my work might carry the potential to make a difference in his life and the lives of others who also have multiple racial heritages.

Preface: Representational Form

I have approached the writing of this dissertation attempting to be always mindful of my responsibility to honor the voices that have contributed to this work. Of course, I have felt the great weight of this responsibility in relation to the three young women who graciously gave of themselves through the telling of their stories of experience. However, my responsibility to honor voice also includes a responsibility to represent my presence throughout the inquiry process. At the outset, my story gave rise to this dissertation study; therefore my voice is imprinted upon this work from its inception. Moreover, as a narrative inquirer, I understand that as participants and I came together we co-composed the inquiry. The study became an inquiry into their experiences, my experiences, and our experiences. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain,

Narrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience, as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally. Participants are in relation, and we as researchers are in relation to participants. Narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation. (p.189)

Therefore, it has been my goal to draw my readers into participants' stories while simultaneously revealing my own participation in the co-composition of the stories as they were retold and relived during our research conversations.

Additionally, my literature review led me to the stories of other persons who contributed to my knowledge and understandings, to my wonderings, and to my research puzzle. Their voices entered my consciousness and opened me to think differently about my own experience, the experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages, the

experiences of persons of color, and the experiences of marginalized people. Their voices became part of my experience of this inquiry, and their voices must be honored in this work.

It became obvious to me that in order to live out this responsibility in an ethical, trustworthy manner I needed to give great consideration to how I would represent the voices on paper so that the people involved would be honored. With that in mind, narrative accounts for each participant often include story fragments from research conversations and word images (the weaving together of portions of multiple research conversations or a particular portion of a single research conversation that stood out as particularly meaningful). When creating word images I made use of the space on the page to represent the movement between the personal and social dimensions of experience (Dewey, 1938/1997). I presented ***others' stories of experience and others' voices in conversations in boldface italics*** and *my stories of experience and my voice in conversations in plain italics*. In addition, these representations have been set apart from the other words on the page by presenting them single-spaced and indented.

I have attempted to quilt together “a set of...interconnected images and representations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9; see also Ely, 2007). It is my hope that through these representational forms my readers will be able to visually “hear” the voices and be drawn into the stories of experience of all those who have contributed to this work. It is also my hope that the readers will be transformed in a positive way by these stories of experiences of persons with multiple racial heritages.

Also, for purposes of anonymity, I use pseudonyms in places of names of people, and fictitious names are used for the names of schools, cities, and so forth.

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Chapter 1: Narrative Beginnings

I walked into the main branch of the public library ready to begin my study of images and representations of multiracial characters in children's picture books. I was taking a Multicultural Education course and the major project for the class required that I engage in an analysis of how a minority population is represented in a particular form of media. I chose to study multiracial characters in picture books because my sweet little grandson, who is multiracial, had been born about a week before the class began. I was curious about what he and his mother might find as he grows older.

I logged in to the computerized catalogue system, and began my search to identify books to study. I was quickly disheartened—I found nothing. Certainly, there had to be something! I decided to seek help from a library staff member in the children's section. She told me that there was absolutely no way I would find what I was looking for by searching the card catalogue. I found this quite bothersome and wondered how a parent or a child would find these books if there is no category for them in the card catalogue.

I asked what she suggested. She pointed across the room to two large wooden bins of picture books, and told me that the only thing I could do was to go through the books one by one and pull out the ones that met my study criteria.

I found a total of three books for my analysis. THREE!!! Only THREE!!! I was so discouraged. I wondered how my grandson and other multiracial children could feel comfortable and affirmed not only in classrooms but in public libraries, book stores, and watching children's movies when they are not reflected in what they are seeing. I suspected that there wouldn't be a lot to choose from, but I was shocked by the almost non-existence.

Wading in a Stream – A Metaphor for Experience

For a narrative inquirer, “research begins with inquiring into the researchers’ own stories of experience” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 193)—their own “I” stories—as a process for uncovering personal justifications, and to prepare for entering into reciprocal relationships with future study participants (Clandinin, 2013). As a researcher hoping to be allowed into the life stories of others—their “I” stories—it was essential that I gain knowledge of who I was and who I was becoming in relation to my inquiry and in relationship to future imagined participants. I needed to know and understand my “I” and my “becoming I”, an “I” that I was and am “revising, and now and then renewing”

(Greene, 1995, p. 5). These “I” stories are my narrative beginnings that illuminated the starting points of the inquiry. And, “because narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 55). Therefore, narrative beginnings not only illuminate who we were and are in relation to our inquiry, they also point us toward the future of our “I” stories and who we are becoming.

Thinking about the word “I”, I see that though it is very small, it is probably one of the largest words in the English language, because, when it emerges from a person’s lips, it holds beneath it the complex layers of life and identity. When I say that very small word, I know that the largeness of who I am, the complexities of my multiple “I” stories are embodied within that word. I know that my entire identity is carried within the word “I”. I also know that it is the sharing of stories and caring for the stories of others that allows us to enter into relationships with others, to know them, and to come to love them. I have learned that stories have great power, and what we do with stories determines whether that power moves positively or negatively in the flow of a person’s life and the lives of others who live in relation with a person.

My inquiry into my “I” has shown me that the story of my life, any life, does not begin in one place or in one moment in time. It is an intermingling and overlapping assortment of stories of experiences, with particular experiences standing out as more defining, more meaningful, and more poignant at particular times and in particular contexts. As I looked more and more deeply into my experiences and entered into their telling, retelling, and reliving (Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steeves, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Clandinin 2013), it became impossible for me to view them as

independent from one another; “it is hard to see the definitive beginning or end of...experiences” (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 577). Realizing that what I have experienced as I have grown older has redefined how I retell and relive remembered events from my earlier days, I came to see that the temporality of experience does not march exclusively in one direction. Drawing on Dewey’s (1938/1997) theory of experience, Downey and Clandinin (2010) explained,

Human time is fluid, as we travel prospectively into possible futures and retrospectively back into possible pasts. The reconstruction of experience involves the reconsideration of not only what happened but also a concurrent reconsideration of what might yet happen, all set within situations that are still happening. (p. 395)

This intermingling of experiences—past, present, and future—and the stories told of those experiences, bring new stories and old stories together modifying each other as we move backward and forward (Downey & Clandinin, 2010), living out what Dewey (1938/1997) termed the principle of continuity of experiences, that “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 35). In the process,

We remember events of many years ago as if they happened today, or so it feels. We remember details and experience emotion. Much has intervened and, undoubtedly, events as happened and as remembered are only loosely connected factually but strongly connected narratively. The memory now, of the event then, is intimately tied to the narrative path we have followed. And although we may

mistrust the veracity of the memory as an empirical record, we celebrate it as a revealing narrative construction. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, pp. 95-96)

For narrative inquirers, it doesn't matter if a person is telling a story with "factual" accuracy. What matters is that the story being told is the "true" story at the present time. It is the story of the person's past through their eyes of today, and it is the story that will move with them into the future as new tellings, retellings, and relivings create a new "true" story. These are not fabrications (or worse—lies); they are new creations that arise through "the interplay between memory and imagination that informs and shapes our experiences, our memories of our life stories, and our imagining of stories to live by" (Caine et al., 2013, p. 581). They are the now experience of a past experience. They are expressions of what that experience has become in the re-experiencing of it, and lead us to compose new stories.

Upon continued reflection I began to see my experiences simultaneously radiating out from me and reflecting back to me—an inward and outward (Downey & Clandinin, 2010) movement that arises because experiences are not undergone in isolation. They are embedded within the places and relationships where they occur and shaped by those places and relationship. They contain a modifying force that flows through those who have undergone the experience, changing each of them in ways that are dependent upon the individual's unique compilation of previous experiences. This is Dewey's (1938/1997) principle of interaction of experience, the equal mingling of "objective and internal conditions" (p. 42) —the conditions that exist outside (the social) and inside (the personal).

In an effort to represent the overlapping and intermingling of my “I” stories, I created a graphic representation (see Figure 1) of experiences that moved me to the space I occupied as I imagined this narrative inquiry. Through the use of multiple sets of concentric circles, I illustrated the reverberation of my experiences moving out in all directions modifying each other. This image brought forth the metaphor of pebbles and rocks being thrown into a stream creating ripples that spread out from their centers, bumping into each other causing the “waters of my life” to continually undulate in new

Figure 1. My Autobiographical Graphic Annal

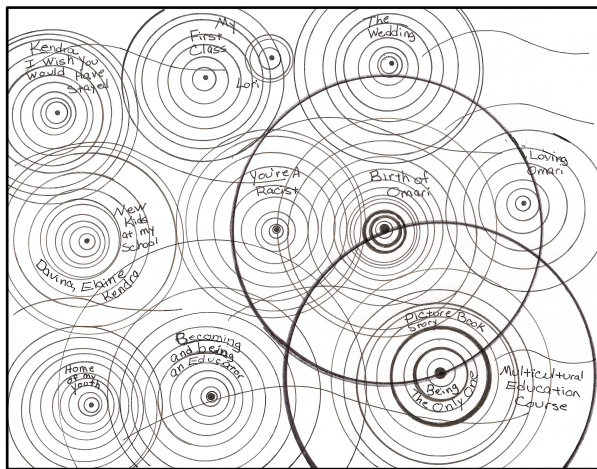


Figure 1. Graphic representation of stories of experiences that emerged in my autobiographical narrative inquiry.

and unexpected directions. The water flows in a progression from place to place, interacting with the changing environment, be that contexts or people.

Each pebble or rock thrown into the stream of life alters the flow of the water. As the pebbles and rocks settle to the bottom of the stream—moving

away from my conscious attention—they change the character and composition of the streambed influencing the undercurrent of my life, and cause both subtle and profound shifts. These pebbles and rocks are of varying sizes depending on the impact of the experience. They can seem to disappear to the bottom, however they can be retrieved upon demand or when life circumstances bring them to the surface. When retrieved they have often been altered by other experiences—perhaps with some added algae or maybe

worn away a bit by the flow of the water. Some of the rocks are so large that I often trip over them, which requires me to attend to them quite frequently. I have dealt with some of the more problematic rocks by attempting to cast them away only to later find them, once again, coming to the surface or interfering with my attempts to wade through the water. I have come to understand that once they have entered the stream of my life they are there for the duration. I can, however, rearrange them, break them apart, or even polish them up a bit as I work to make meaning of them.

Several Large Rocks in the Stream

As I gazed into the stream of my life I saw several particularly significant rocks that brought me to this research puzzle. Two of the larger rocks—the birth of my grandson and the *Multicultural Education* course—live within the story of my study of children’s picture books. As I shifted back to this story I relived my awakening to seeing myself more clearly as a person living in a racialized society. I also came to understand that as a white person I have what McIntosh (1990) terms an “invisible knapsack” of white privileges¹, “special provisions, maps, passports, code books, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (p. 31), that I did not earn but have been bestowed upon me by virtue of my skin color.

I became acutely aware that I am able to go just about anywhere within the realm of my daily life with a feeling that I fit in—I belong. I can go to the shopping mall, the grocery store, the public library, or simply walk down the street and see myself reflected back by the people and images around me. Realizing that my grandson will grow up

¹ White privilege is a term used by many scholars of race (e.g. Asante, 1991; Case, 2012; Fishkin, 1995; Hartigan, 1997; Kendall, 2002; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lund, 2010; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; Taylor, 2008) to represent social and economic power advantages held by whites based solely on skin color. Social and institutional structures often reflect a normative view of whiteness resulting in these privileges being unrecognized by those who possess them.

without that privilege brought a jolting recognition regarding what it means to be “different” in this society, and what it means for me, in my whiteness, to be seen as part of the accepted “normal”.

During my study of children’s picture book my invisible knapsack began to spill into the stream of my life, causing great disruptions. I began to understand, to feel, the reality that “white people never have to think about race unless they choose to address it” (Lund, 2010, p. 18). My privileged position as a white person means that I can choose to look or not look at if and how minorities are represented in media; I only did so because a need arose. People of color and people who have multiple racial heritages have no choice but to be aware of the scarcity of images reflective of their experiences and their stories to live by². There was a silence, a gap in my experience that I had to face. This silence enveloped me and separated me from the realities of the lives of others. It is as though the water around me was missing an essential mineral, but because that mineral had never been there I did not feel its absence. It seemed natural and normal.

This silence did not just happen; the people and structures around me created it. Those who cared for me in my formative years taught me the silence; they taught me not to hear. This was possible because “we learn about values, rules, roles, and assumptions from those we trust. In conforming to their messages without question we, in turn, pass those same messages on to others” (Lund, 2010, p. 15). We grow up trusting our caregivers even when what they are doing is harmful, because we do not have the experiences to judge it so. As young children we do not have a choice. However, as we grow into adults, the responsibility for how we live our lives shifts from our caregivers to ourselves. As I grew into an adult I failed to recognize my responsibility to examine the

² “Stories to live by” is a narrative view of identity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

silence. In fact, in many ways, I nurtured the silence. I was quite comfortable living in my life circumstances seeing myself reflected in the world around me. While there were moments when the silence was broken, I often shunned opportunities to confront my fears, hear and listen to the voices of others, and to re-story my self in relation to the voices of others who I did not know or understand. In this, I became co-creator of the silence.

The experiences represented in story of my study of children's picture books shattered the silence causing me to realize, just as McIntosh (1990) realized for herself, that I “enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence” (p. 31). This realization has led to a growing understanding that “privilege, particularly white . . . privilege, is hard to see for those of us who were born with access to power and resources. It is very visible for those to whom privilege was not granted” (Kendall, 2002, p. 1). My retellings and relivings of this story often bring forth anger and frustration with myself for my lack of awareness of who I was and was becoming and with the larger social stories being told.

When people do not see themselves reflected within their environment, their identities are shaped. They are being told to become what they see. If they are unable to, or unwilling to, become what they see I imagine they come to view themselves as “less than” or “other” in relation to those who “fit”. The images and the characters in picture books are part of the water in the stream of our combined social lives. The water has a particular characteristic and all those within that stream are expected to be able to gain sustenance from that environment. This is a message that says *the stories we tell about ourselves—about who we are and how we live—are the stories you should tell about*

yourselves. This is a silencing of voices, a silencing of stories, a silencing of identities. This silencing, and the accompanying gaps within and amongst the told stories, moves from the social spaces where it is born into personal spaces where personal “stories to live by are shaped...[and] live in actions [and] in relationships with others” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, pp. 161-162). It moves inward bringing a story that bumps against the sense of self (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), shaping and changing stories to live by and shaping and changing lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

My emotional response to this situation can fall below the surface of my life stream, but, it quickly reemerges when an experience reminds me of the reality that white privilege is an institutional (rather than personal) set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who dominate the powerful positions in our institutions. One of the primary privileges is that of having greater access to power and resources than people of color do; in other words, purely on the basis of skin color doors open to us that are not open to other people.

(Kendall, 2002, p. 1)

Even within the realm of children’s picture books, access and power is almost exclusively reserved for white children and withheld from children of color and children with multiple racial heritages. As McCorkel and Myers (2003) explained, “whiteness...represents both a position of structural privilege and a legacy of cultural practices premised on exclusion, domination, and exploitation” (p. 215). The exclusion of children of color from children’s picture books is reflective of societal beliefs that employ skin color, and the attendant judgments of race, as criteria for inclusion and belongingness. For children of color, and children with multiple racial heritages, this

exclusion communicates a social position subordinate to white children, a message that whiteness is normal, and an expectation that they should be or become what the white characters portray.

Rocks in the Undercurrent – Growing Up

Retelling the story of my study of children's picture books and the influence of my grandson's presence in my life often brings forth a deeply emotional reaction. It is a reaction that is born of fear for his future, and is a reaction that is grounded in living in a society that privileges some people over others, and I see him as a person from whom society might withhold privileges. This fear does not emanate from a nebulous source that is somewhere outside of myself. It erupts from within me, and to find its source I needed to shift back to my childhood (Clandinin, 2013)—my family life and my life as an elementary school student.

In this look backward I returned to the year I was in eighth grade. I attended a predominantly white Catholic elementary school³. There were a few black families and Hispanic families, the “cafeteria ladies”⁴ were black, and even though one of my friends was Hispanic my family did not socialize with people of color. Although not a daily occurrence, the use of racial epithets was not uncommon in my home. These derogatory messages combined with the absence of people of color in my personal experiences made it clear that people who were not like me should be feared and avoided. I am reminded of the words of Beverly Tatum (1997),

the impact of racism begins early. Even in our preschool years, we are exposed to misinformation about people different from ourselves. Many of us grow up in

³ The Catholic elementary school I attended served students in grades one through eight.

⁴ This is a term commonly used for female food service workers in schools.

neighborhoods where we had limited opportunities to interact with people different from our own families . . . consequently, most of the early information we receive about “others” . . . does not come as a result of firsthand experiences. The secondhand information we receive has often been distorted, shaped by cultural stereotypes, and left incomplete. (pp. 4-5)

It is as if Tatum was specifically describing my childhood social conditions.

These social conditions were upended when the school I attended was combined with a recently closed, predominantly black, Catholic elementary school. There was great silence around this change; I do not recall a single teacher or school administrator speaking to the students about it at any time before, during, or even at the close of our year together. It seems to me that the children, no matter which school we had previously attended, were supposed to pretend that we didn’t notice. It was as if the teachers expected the children to be able to disconnect from our past experiences of school and instantly create new stories of school (“stories given to schools”) and school stories (“stories told about schools”) (Craig, 2007, p. 177; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). We were being asked to do the impossible, because the stories we live and tell “are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41).

I wonder if there was an assumption that Catholic Christian teachings would be all the students (and their parents) needed to accept each other and almost instantly create new stories of school and stories of community. I wonder if this notion combined with the broader social climate at the time is what led to what I now see as silencing of my stories and the stories of other children. It was the early 1970s—Martin Luther King Jr.

had been assassinated only four years prior—and I wonder if the adults thought it better to not talk about the changes in our school, our parish community, and society, and the obvious racial component. Discussions around race bring up topics and issues that many people would rather not address, exposing tensions that many would rather not acknowledge. They failed to see that tensions, though uncomfortable and even frightening, “are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways” (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010, p. 82).

I wonder if fear caused a retreat into silence that prevented the children from entering into the space where the tensions lived—a space where I imagine that it might have been possible to learn to hear and tell stories of the past and create new stories for the present and future—stories that might have resolved at least some tensions. But, silence was chosen, and the silence magnified and multiplied the tensions. I also wonder if, perhaps, there was a feeling of comfort and safety in the silence. It was familiar; the silence had been passed on to teachers and administrators from those that came before and that silence was passed on to me and to the rest of the children. Perhaps there was not a “decision” to be silent, but the silence was the passing on of a larger social narrative around race that tells those who are in privileged positions that if we maintain this silence we can pretend that the issues, the tensions, the struggles do not exist. This silence allows the privileged to pretend that there is no problem that needs a solution. This then becomes a powerful force in the shaping of the stories to live by of all involved.

In this silence my stories to live by were shaped through a mixture of feelings of comfort and abandonment. Comfort came with my ability to continue to live many of my familiar stories. For me, and the rest of the children who did not have to change to a new

school, our physical environment stayed constant, and most of the staff members stayed the same. We were in a place of familiarity. Yet, I still struggled to tell new stories of what it meant to be in school. The social environment had changed, which meant every interaction with another human being within the school environment was different than what I had been prepared for through my prior experiences of home and school. In this I felt alone and deserted.

One of my most vivid memories from that year revolves around preparing for the presentation of a dramatic reading. This was something that one of the new teachers to our school, a teacher who had come from the other school, had planned for us to do. I remember being quite nervous and feeling extremely incapable. I had never done anything like that before. I was a very shy child, and the thought of standing in front of an audience to “perform” was terrifying.

One day, several of us were sitting on the floor in the hallway outside our classroom practicing our presentations. I am not sure exactly what I did—perhaps it was what I wasn’t doing—but my difficulties with this activity must have been obvious. One of the new students, Elaine, got up from her place down the hall, walked toward me, sat down and gave me some advice about how to present a particular line. It was quick, clear, and to the point. Before I could say a word, she stood up and headed back down the hallway to her previous spot.

Before, during, and after that interaction, I found this student to be quite intimidating. Actually, I was afraid of her. She was loud, boisterous, and rarely smiled—except when surrounded by her friends. She wore her hair in a large Afro, and often wore large hoop earrings.

In the retelling and reliving of this story I feel in my being that the new students responded to this activity with a calmness that comes with familiarity. This activity, I imagine, was part of their school stories. I imagine that Elaine knew this activity as if it were an old friend. For me however, this activity and Elaine’s appearance and behavior were unfamiliar; they did not fit my school stories. In that particular moment in that familiar hallway, a hallway I had walked through many, many times since I was a young child, the calmness of familiarity ceased to exist. I did not understand her, and I did not

understand why she had come to my aid. I also had no one to turn to who would help me make sense of it. I imagine that my friends who witnessed it did not understand either—we never talked about it. Again, silence prevailed.

For the new students, not only did they have to start going to school with a great number of children and teachers they did not know, not only were they the racial minority coming into an environment populated with the racial majority, they had to go to a new place—unfamiliar school and church buildings—where they had to create their own sense of comfort and belongingness. I am reminded of Lugones (1987) and her notion of a “world” as a metaphor for a complicated mixture of circumstances and identities woven together to create a “construction of life” (p. 10). Lugones (1987) explained that a “world”

may be an actual society given its dominant culture’s description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a “world” can also be such a society given a non-dominant construction, or it can be such a society or *a* society given an idiosyncratic construction. (p. 10)

In the school of my eighth grade year, I was a person inhabiting a “world” that was described and constructed by the dominant culture. The new children were forced to learn to travel to that “world”, attempt to make sense of that “world”, and take up residence in that “world”. While living in and being constructed by our own “worlds” we were also struggling to compose a new “world”, but this new “world” was much more like my “world” than theirs.

While inhabiting a “world” we may be more or less “at ease” (Lugones, 1987) with that world and with the way that world constructs us. I was, I imagine, much more at

ease in the “world” of school during my eighth grade year than were the children who had been transported to that “world”. While my level of ease—my confidence in my knowledge of the “world” of school, my understanding and acceptance of the rules within that “world”, the presence of people with whom I felt a connection and shared history (Lugones, 1987)—was diminished, it was still quite strong. For the children new to the school, I imagine that these sources of ease were close to nonexistent.

I imagine that they, too, felt abandoned by the adults, but likely at a deeper level than I. I imagine that they, too, struggled to tell new stories of school and live new school stories, and this struggle was likely more difficult than my own. I wonder how their experience of living and telling new stories fit with and bumped against their past stories of school and school stories. I know that within my attempts to tell and live new stories I felt alone, uncertain, fearful, and I felt a lack of power. I imagine that they felt something similar, and I imagine that their feelings were greatly magnified in comparison to mine. But in the silence no one talked about what each child, each person, was experiencing.

Laying this experience next to my experience of studying children’s picture books, I again see the silencing of stories to live by. I again see a message that says *the stories we tell about ourselves—about who we are and how we live—are the stories you should tell about yourselves*. This, too, was a silencing of voices, a silencing of stories, a silencing of identities. The silencing and our reactions to the silencing have the power to shape our stories to live by and our composing of new stories. Furthermore, social structures and social dynamics also tell stories to us and to others about who we are and who we should become. These stories also shape stories to live by that we compose about ourselves and tell to others, having profound effects on how we view the life we have

lived in the past, how we live our life in the present, and how we compose our life into the future.

I see this silencing and shaping as a co-composing—a collaboration between the individual and society—of stories to live by. I also see that this co-composing of stories to live by is endemic to the human condition and a result of the interactive nature of human experience. This brings me to think about the morality of being involved in the co-composition of the stories to live by of another person in a thoughtless or careless manner. To silence the story of another, to tell hurtful and negative stories of another and then turn your back on the impact, or not recognize the impact, is certainly callous and quite possibly the result of holding a privileged position or attempting to gain a privileged position over another person. Certainly, this co-composing has the potential for positive results. For this to be possible, one would approach others within an “ethic of care” (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2010), a relationship in which “we are more likely to listen attentively to others” (Noddings, 2010, p. 391). The carer and the cared-for seek to know each other reciprocally and the “caring-about” each other becomes a “foundation for justice” (Noddings, 2010, p. 392). An ethic of care can be employed in face-to-face relationships and in relationships in which the carer and the cared-for never actually meet each other. A person can be in relationship with another and care for another simply because both are human beings, and “human beings are born from and into relation; it is our original condition” (Noddings, 2010, p. 390).

It may be difficult to know or anticipate how social interactions impact the stories to live by of others, but to attempt to gain understanding and to take responsibility for the ways in which our actions impact the stories to live by of others are elements of relational

ethics. Clandinin and Caine (2013) explained, “relational ethics are marked by responsiveness, as well as marked by short- and long-term responsibilities” (p. 191; see also Huber, Clandinin, & Huber, 2006). These responsibilities require that “we consult our consciences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 172), and enter into relationships with a spirit of “self-reflection, contemplation, openness, and uncertainty” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 191).

My eighth grade experience became instrumental in creating the conditions that lead to my emotional reactions to my experiences as a grandmother realizing that my grandson may not find his social environment to be open, affirming, and welcoming of his experiences and stories to live by. It saddens and angers me to think of others—through personal interactions and social structures—silencing and shaping the stories to live by of my grandson in possibly damaging ways. The possibility that those responsible for the damage may be either unaware or lack concern regarding the impact of their actions is quite distressing.

Failing to Wade in a Different Stream

Shifting forward in time, I see that I, too, have silenced the voices of others. Perhaps the experience from my past as a silenced student among silenced students has moved forward through my experience teaching me to silence the stories of others who are excluded from the dominant social narrative.

During a meeting with some parents about their daughter’s academic struggles, I suggested that they could help by speaking more English to their daughter at home. They were quite offended, and abruptly left my office—I didn’t understand why. Within a few days my boss received a letter complaining about my suggestion, calling me a racist, and informing him that they were removing their daughter from the school. I was crushed and I was offended . . . how could this be? I was trying very hard to be open and welcoming to the growing Hispanic community in the school. I was simply giving them advice that I genuinely

believed would assist their daughter's academic progress. I declared to myself . . . "I am not a racist".

After some reflection, I knew that I must have done something wrong, even though I was sure that what I had done was with the best intentions, and I meant no disrespect. I sought the advice of a member of the Hispanic community. She explained to me how very important the Spanish language is to the identity of the community. She explained that what they heard me saying was that they should deny that for the sake of learning to read in English. She explained that what I said made them feel that who they are and how they wanted to live their family life was not acceptable in our school.

In this story fragment, I—the principal of the school and a member of the white majority with greater power—failed to hear the familial and cultural stories of these parents. In my retelling and reliving of this story I realized it is necessary to travel to the “worlds” that others inhabit. I failed to “‘world’ –travel”⁵ (Lugones, 1987), which is a “shifting from the mainstream construction of life where [one] is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where [one] is more or less ‘at home’” (p. 3). Not only can people outside the mainstream travel between worlds, but those comfortable in the mainstream can travel to outside worlds, but to do so requires effort, openness, and humility. Lugones (1987) made clear the necessity of “world” –travelling for seeing others as human beings with valuable and meaningful lives, coming to understand others, and creating relationships between inhabitants of different “worlds”.

Without knowing the other's “world,” one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one. Through travelling to other people's “worlds” we discover that there are “worlds” in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resistors, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant

⁵ In my metaphor, “world” –travelling could be thought of as wading in someone else's stream of life.

perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. (Lugones, 1987, p. 18)

This story fragment illustrates how easily those of us who are comfortable in the mainstream of life fail to recognize that other streams exist. It is also a story that tells me I must be ever vigilant in my efforts to counteract the impact of the isolationist and racist messages that have washed over me and permeated my life as a member of the dominant and privileged group in society. I am always in the midst, always in the process of awakening.

At the time this event took place, my daughter was engaged to her future husband. When questioned by a close family member about the wisdom of her dating an African American, I let that person know that he treats her with kindness, care, and respect, and that was what was most important. I also felt the questioning and suspicious glances from other family members when he first began to attend family functions. I wonder if these questions, doubts, and glances were the result of them hearing a “single story” (Adichie, 2009, n.p.) about African Americans, and, more specifically, about African American males.

A single story is created when a people are characterized as “one thing, and only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become” (Adichie, 2009, n.p.). This reduces people to stereotypes “and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete, they make one story become the only story” (Adichie, 2009, n.p.). I imagine that the single story that my family members had heard about African American males revolved around poor character, irresponsibility, crime, violence, and living in the “wrong part of town”. Knowing my son-in-law illustrated to

me that the stereotypes people hold about African American males were inaccurate representations and simply unfounded propaganda. I wonder if he also had a similar impact on my family members as the comments and glances have, at least from my vantage point, disappeared. Perhaps he was instrumental in telling a new story, a multifaceted and richer story, that my family and I heard, that was humanizing and anti-reductive.

Moving backward beyond the experiences represented in my story of telling those parents to speak more English in their home, back to the sociality of my childhood, and then forward through the experiences of my eighth grade year, and through the experiences of being and becoming a wife, a mother, an educator, a mother-in-law, and a grandmother, it is apparent to me that my personal internal world has been going through a slow, profound, yet incomplete transformation. I wonder if coming into relationship with the students who were compelled to travel into the “world” of elementary school that I occupied, began that transformation. Dewey’s (1938/1997) principle of continuity of experience tells me that it most certainly modified my future experiences. Moving forward, I see that that experience lived within me as my husband and I engaged in numerous conversations related to the need for social justice and sharing the world’s resources with all people in order to create a peaceful world. These conversations were grounded in a spiritual belief in the oneness of humanity and the equality of all people in the eyes of God. This became a major theme of our home-life, an idea that shaped our familial stories to live by. This story to live by was instrumental in reshaping my personal stories to live by, and I imagine that it profoundly shaped our daughter’s stories to live by. Even though I was raised in and shaped by familial and social environments that

contained racist attitudes and were built upon white privileges that I did not at the time recognize, my husband and I raised a child who was comfortable dating and marrying a black man. Her choices push against the undercurrents of racial biases within my family and within society at large.

I thought that I had set aside my childhood experiences, and that I no longer held racist attitudes. When told that I was a racist because I had suggested that a Hispanic family speak English at home to help their daughter be more successful in school, I came to my own rescue denying the accusation and assuring myself that it simply was not, could not, be true. I was convinced that my actions were an outgrowth of care and concern for the child's academic success. I thought what I was recommending was in her best interest. I was not advocating that the family discontinue speaking Spanish. In fact, I had been an advocate for actively recruiting Hispanic families to enroll in the school, and I had also encouraged the inclusion of the Spanish language in liturgical services. I implemented school policies that resulted in creating Spanish language versions of parent communications and providing Spanish-English translators for parent-teacher conference. I had, at least in my estimation, made significant efforts to welcome the growing Hispanic community. Comparing my actions to the actions of others in the community who disagreed with some, if not all, of these decisions, I saw myself as a person who had overcome my racist attitudes, biases, and behaviors.

The truth is that I really didn't know myself as well as I thought I did; I didn't know my own stories. I also did not know and understand the stories of the people around me. I simply could not understand how my suggestion could be interpreted as an expression of racist attitudes. In reality, I was in a state of "dysconscious racism...a form

of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges” (King, 1991, p. 135).

I was unquestioningly accepting and promoting the idea that speaking English is more valuable than speaking Spanish. It was disguised in a story about language skills and academic success, but it was rooted in an acceptance of the primacy of the norms of white society and the inability to see an alternative option within the structure of the existing school environment and academic curriculum.

To be labeled a “racist” brought a deep and shuddering feeling of shame. Even in the present, as I retell this story and relive this experience, I feel it in my skin, I feel it all over my body, and I want to pull away from that feeling with my entire being. When I ask myself if I was or am a “racist” I want to scream “No!” But when I ask myself if I have behaved in a racist manner, I must admit that the answer to that question is “Yes.” And, as I moved backward to this story fragment and pulled it forward into my current knowledge of my self and a deeper and clearer understanding of what it means to be racist, I know that I have been taught to be racist and I learned that lesson well—so well that I failed to recognize it. In my lack of understanding and appreciation for the importance of the Spanish language in this family’s stories to live by—their cultural identity—I was living that lesson.

I can see now that I was not traveling to their “worlds”. This family was expected to travel to my “worlds” of school—the “worlds” of the dominant culture—on a daily basis. I, on the other hand, did not live with such an expectation. As the person with the greater power, it was my responsibility to travel to their worlds, but I did not do that. In fact, in my place of privilege, I did not realize, I did not even consider, that I needed to do that. For me, the one who inhabits the mainstream, to travel to their “world” I would have

needed to perceive them lovingly with respect and openness. But I perceived them arrogantly (Lugones, 1987). I approached them with a mindset of an expert who was more knowledgeable than they about what was best for them and their daughter. I was minimizing their stories to live by, and denying their “world”. Through my arrogant perception, I created a barrier that prevented me from travelling to their “world”, and I did not welcome them into my “world”.

Lugones (1987) explained that in order to lovingly perceive another person one must approach that person with a “playful” (p. 16) attitude. This is not the “agonistic” (pp. 15-16) playfulness that accompanies competitive games resulting in a winner and a loser. With such playfulness one “*cannot* travel across ‘worlds,’ though one can kill other ‘worlds’ with it” (p. 16). I approached these parents in an agonistic manner, and as a result I could not travel to their “worlds” and I destroyed their “world” of school in that time and that place.

The playfulness that allows “world” –travelling is a playfulness that is expansive not limiting, it is “in part an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges as a source of wisdom and delight” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). In this playfulness, the traveller sees herself as a learner, an explorer, a discoverer, and views the inhabitant of the “world” being traveled to as a knowledgeable guide with whom the traveller can join in efforts to reconstruct who they are in relation to each other and the “worlds” they inhabit. This I did not do. I believed that I had done all I could do, and I hung on to my view of this interaction for quite some time. In fact, it wasn’t until I took the *Multicultural Education* class that I realized what I had done.

Ripples in the Stream – Concerns and Wonderings

I know that I would not have experienced the *Media Analysis Project* in the way I did if it my grandson had not come into my life. His presence changed the sociality—the external objective conditions—of my life, modifying my personal—internal subjective reality. It created a ripple that bumped against the ripples of my experience in the *Multicultural Education* course. I have been transformed by a feeling of love for him that goes deep inside my being. My love, care, and concern for him is what led to my frustration and anger at what I discovered in my study of children’s picture books. I ache with a desire for him to grow up loved, accepted, and affirmed. I desire great and good things for him, and I fear that the broad social narrative around race may rob him of those great and good things. I am concerned that he is entering a broader society that may not love, accept, and affirm him. I wonder if his voice will be silenced or heard and if his identity—the stories he tells himself about himself, his stories to live by—will be affirmed or diminished and how they will be shaped. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) explained, identities

from a narrative point of view . . . have histories. They are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed entity, an unchanging narrative construction, or they may continue to grow and change. They may even be, indeed, almost certainly are, multiple depending on the life situation in which one finds oneself The identities we have, the stories we live by, tend to show different facets depending on the situations in which we find ourselves Different facets, different

identities, can show up, be reshaped and take on new life in different landscape settings”. (p. 94)

I wonder about the multiple worlds and multiple identities that my grandson will construct. I wonder about the worlds in which he will feel “at ease” (Lugones, 1987) and the worlds in which he will feel dis/ease (Lugones, 1987). I wonder about his future experiences in all the places where books and images are present: libraries, schools, bookstores, curriculum materials, movies, videos, television, games, and so forth. I also wonder about how his experiences of family will impact his experiences of society, and I wonder about how his experiences of society will impact his experiences of family. I wonder when he will realize that his family is different from many other families, and how that realization will impact the stream of his life and his stories to live by. I wonder about how the attitudes and perceptions of those he meets in life (at playgrounds, at stores, at school, and so forth) will impact who he sees himself to be and how he will come to feel about who he sees himself to be. I wonder about what he will be interested in as he grows up (sports, music, academics, reading, art) and how those interests—and others’ reactions to his interests—will impact his stories to live by. I wonder about how his gender, the lightness or darkness of his skin, the shape of his face, and the texture of his hair will impact his experiences and his stories to live by.

These concerns and wonderings are not only intellectual musings; these thoughts permeate my entire being. I not only think them, I feel them. They spring from my conscious recognition that for some people privileges are withheld because they are different in ways that powerful forces in our society have identified as reasons to deem them unworthy. It wasn’t that I was intellectually unaware of this prior to taking the

Multicultural Education course. It is that the experience forced me to feel it, to know it in my body. McIntosh (1990) told us “describing white privilege makes one newly accountable” (p. 31). I now recognize an accountability that ripples through my life and helps me see my complicity in creating the social narratives within which my grandson will compose his life.

I have come to see that my responsibility to him as his grandmother must play out on the personal level and also on the broader social level. I feel compelled to make a positive impact on how others view him—my hope is that people will see him as a human being, not *only* as a person with multiple racial heritages. I want him to be seen within the multiplicity of who he is and is becoming. I want him to go to the park, to school, to work, to stores and be seen in all of his complexities, not as a category and not as the embodiment of a single story of race. I want him, and all people with multiple racial heritages, to be treated with care, dignity, and respect; I want to do my part, even if it is a small part, to open a space where their voices and their stories of experiences are heard.

Changes in the Flow and the Streambed

The stories we tell about ourselves to ourselves and to others are our stories to live by. They are the stories that express who we are and who we are becoming. This is a narrative view of identity, and, as I have pointed out previously, this means that our “identities have history” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999, p. 94). The history of my stories to live by reveals that silencing messages have been flowing through my life and through the broader social contexts in which I live. My emotional responses—the personal internal conditions of my life—have been key in moving me toward a change in the course of my life. I have felt the heights of joy, love, and happiness, and the lows of

worry, uncertainty, concern, and fear. Experiencing these emotions, and coming to an understanding that our experiences are always relational, has led me to make a change in my orientation towards others and myself.

My change of course has taken me from a young girl enmeshed in an environment rife with familial and cultural messages of isolation and the silencing of voices to an adult woman searching for a way to create connections and understandings. Returning to my metaphor of a stream of life, the pebbles and rocks that have been thrown into that stream have created ripples changing my life. Through a unique combination of experiences that have built upon each other and bumped into each other I have come to a place where I am rewriting my stories to live by and this narrative inquiry is part of that rewriting.

Chapter 2: A Stream Not My Own

I knew that this narrative inquiry would require that I wade into a stream of life not solely my own. To prepare myself it was essential that I articulate the research puzzle that represented my wonderings about the experiences of persons with multiple racial heritages. This provided a space in which to begin the inquiry relationship even though I knew that the puzzle might change as participants and I, in relationship, negotiated and co-composed the inquiry.

Yet, this was not enough. Coming to the relationship only with puzzles and wonderings would have absolved me of responsibility within the inquiry. I would, in essence, have been asking participants to give while I took. Relationships, however, are reciprocal; therefore it was necessary that I be prepared to open myself to participants; writing my narrative beginnings was a partial preparation for this essential element of relationship. However, it was also necessary that I demonstrated my willingness to become knowledgeable about their possible streams of life. To do this it was essential that I sought out the complex and multiple stories that have been told about race and persons with multiple racial heritages within United States society. It was a given that my knowledge of these stories would be incomplete, however, the willingness to explore them was demonstrative of respect for the participants, and was part of entering the relationship with an “ethic of care” (Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 2010).

Research Puzzle

From the beginning, the puzzle that guided this inquiry was the possible connections between experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages and their multiple identities—their stories to live by. From a narrative view of identities this puzzle

holds within it wonderings about participants' experiences of family, school, and society and how these experiences interact, whether in tension or in harmony, across time in the creation and shaping of their stories to live by. Nested within these wonderings were wonderings about the impact of the personal (such as physical appearance, gender, social class, economic status, interests, skills, and beliefs) and the social (such as family, friends, community members, social narratives, and institutional structures), and places (such as home, school, workplaces, and public spaces) on their experiences, their relationships with others and themselves, and their tellings and retellings of who they are and who they are becoming. Within the research conversations this puzzle came to be expressed as wonderings around inside-of-school experiences, outside-of-school experiences, the interactions of those experiences, the movement between those contexts, and the stories to live by composed around those experiences, interactions, and movements. Recognizing "all children, families, and teachers as curriculum makers when their lives meet in schools and classrooms" (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2012, p. 6), I also began to wonder about the curriculum making taking place inside-of-school and outside-of-school.

Stories to live by are rife with complexities; they "tend to show different facets depending on the situation in which we find ourselves . . . [and can be] reshaped and take on new life in different landscape settings" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 95). Some of these stories are sacred and "told only to others in safe places" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7). Some are "surface telling[s]" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 12), or cover stories, "told to maintain a sense of continuity with the dominant stories" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7). Others, counterstories, "are narratives composed to shift the taken-for-

granted institutional narratives” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 171). Still others provide “confirmation and sustenance” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 97). Tensions may arise as stories to live by bump against each other revealing conflicting stories of identities (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Keeping the nature of stories to live by a primary consideration in this inquiry, I attended to “the ways in which identities are composed, sustained, and changed; the links between borders of space, time, and identity; and...the connections between identity and hierarchies of authority” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4).

This narrative inquiry brought with it a need to inquire into the complexities of race in the social context of the United States. It was essential that I look backward toward the creation of the concept itself, and travel forward attending to stories of race and stories of living with multiple racial heritages. This was necessary because the principles of continuity and interaction of experience (Dewey, 1938/1997) applies to the experiences of society as a collection of individuals as well as individuals themselves. Experiences move forward through members of society influencing our collective and individual histories and shaping our collective and individual stories to live by.

This look backward reminded me of Bateson’s (1994) notion of “peripheral vision”—a form of attention in which we look at the edges and the multiplicity of situations, experiences, and people. It is a vision that moves away from a tendency toward narrowness and singularity and “offers richer and more responsible living” (p. 100). It is a vision that moves the viewer from looking intently at a single element toward gaining insight from factors and issues that may at first appear only tangentially related

but in fact bring about a deeper and more profound understanding. Bateson (1994) explained,

I know that if I look very narrowly and hard at anything I am likely to see something new—like the life between the grass stems that only becomes visible after moments of staring. Softening that concentration is also important—I’ve heard that the best way to catch the movement of falling stars is at the edge of vision. (pp. 103-104)

Looking intently at a single element and softening that concentration to allow for peripheral vision is what I attempted to employ as I looked at race in our past and present. It was my goal to employ that type of vision as I entered into relationship with participants, and as I worked through the data analysis, interpretation, and writing phases of this inquiry.

As I looked backward, I attended to the theoretical writings around racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages and found them wanting. They are too narrow to serve me well if I were to rely on them exclusively. The edges of those writings, however, lead me to look toward stories about the cultural and experiential contexts within which the academic and theoretical live. The weaving together of these stories of race and multiple racial heritages—the theoretical, cultural, and experiential—was essential for me to enter into this inquiry with personal integrity and ethical responsibility. Looking in this way allowed me to hear multiple voices, and in this writing I have attempted to honor these voices that are at once at the center and the periphery depending on where the speaker and the viewer/listener self-situates and is situated by others.

It was not my intention, nor would it have been possible, to attempt to compile a complete history of race in the United States. My goal was to expand my understanding and to gain insights into how this inquiry might fit into the broader conversation regarding race and multiple racial heritages. I chose to begin with the dominant black/white discourse around race. This was not because I agree with this view—in fact I question the concept of race itself—but because this is the view that has been most prevalent in the social discourse and, I imagined, highly impactful upon persons with multiple racial heritages regardless of the components of their racial heritage. It was not meant to imply that issues surrounding race have not impacted persons of Asian, Hispanic/Latin, Native American, or Middle Eastern descent, nor was it to minimize their experiences and stories to live by. It was to take a look at an egregious example of how a group of people was transformed into the “other” and silenced by people with power and privilege. Exploring the “othering” of African Americans provided me with an understanding that allowed me to imagine similar experiences of peoples who have been pushed to social, political, and economic margins.

Social/Cultural Narratives about Race and Persons with Multiple Racial Heritages

What is race, anyway? There doesn't appear to be just one answer to this question. Some say that there are four races: black, white, red, and yellow. Others say that there are many: white, black, Asian, Aboriginal, or Hawaiian, for instance. Race has been used to classify humans according to their common ancestry, using physical characteristics such as skin color, stature, hair texture, and facial features as visible definers. Race is also used to describe a group of people who share some biological characteristics and who differ from other groups because of these characteristics. Still others say that there is no such thing as race, and that race was socially constructed to create divisions among groups. Even though its definition is not completely clear, race plays an important part in everyone's life, as does racism. (Douglas, 2012, p. ix)

Historically, race has been seen as categories used to sort human beings into groups based on biological characteristics that were accompanied by supposed differing intellectual abilities, however there is no clearly delineated, universally agreed upon definition. C. Loring Brace, a biological anthropologist, asserts that

it was the American experience of . . . separate population components facing one another on a daily basis under conditions of manifest and enforced inequality that created the concept in the first place and endowed it with the assumption that those perceived “races” had very different sets of capabilities. Those thoughts are very influential and have become enshrined in laws and regulations. (Brace & Gill, 2000, n.p.)

Manifestations of this story of race predate the founding of the United States when “leaders of the revolution relied on [Enlightenment] science to justify the injustices of slavery. Jefferson . . . insisted that Blacks and Whites could never live together because there were ‘real distinctions’ that ‘nature’ had made between the two races” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 259). In that time and place many viewed blacks and whites as separate from each other, but such views did not necessarily relegate blacks to slavery. According to Hobbs (2014) “these two categories [race and slave status] would not become fully intertwined until the early nineteenth century” (p. 36). Foundational in the creation of the black-slave/white-free dichotomy were an increased need for manual labor in agriculture and the existence of persons with multiple racial heritages who were often born as a result of sexual relations between white slave owners and black female slaves (Hobbs 2014). This was accompanied by

hysterics about maintaining the boundaries of whiteness. . . . As the system of racialized slavery matured, nineteenth-century Americans underwent a moral panic about the parameters of whiteness. Perhaps the greatest concern was that if black could be mistaken for white, then white could easily be mistaken for black. (Hobbs, 2014, p. 42)

In the United States, the legacy of such fears persisted beyond the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation⁶, and was expressed in legal structures such as Jim Crow⁷ and anti-miscegenation laws that codified racial segregation. These laws were overturned with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the 1967 Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia* that found anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional.

While disagreement still exists as to whether or not the concept of race is supported by biological characteristics (Brace & Gill, 2000), research strongly indicates that there is no genetic foundation for racial categories (Nakazawa, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2010) notes, “Current thinking about race argues that it is a social construction” (p. 259; see also Shih & Sanchez, 2009), which morphs in response to changing social and political factors (Root, 2003a). The concept of race and definitions of racial categories are a creation of society, and can, therefore, be recreated by society. Jacobson (1998) argued, “we tend to think of race as being indisputable, *real* . . . [however] races are invented categories” (p. 1) that “reflect the competing notions of history, peoplehood, and collective destiny by which power has been organized and contested on the American

⁶ The Emancipation Proclamation, issued in 1863 during the U.S. Civil War, was a proclamation and executive order issued by President Abraham Lincoln that freed all slaves held in the southern states known as the Confederate States of America.

⁷ The term Jim Crow refers to laws that came into existence after the Reconstruction Period that followed the U.S. Civil War. These laws codified racial segregation.

scene” (p. 9). Foeman (2012) echoed this view by succinctly stating “humans construct these categories for human purposes” (p. 310).

In addition, Shih and Sanchez (2009) noted, “the presence of multiracial individuals highlights the mutability of racial categories because multiracial individuals can claim many racial identities simultaneously” (p. 4). It is also important to remember that these social constructions and the accompanying “theory of who is who, of who belongs and who does not, of who deserves what and who is capable of what” (Jacobson, 1998, p. 6) are entangled with physical characteristics (Banks & McGee Banks, 2013, p. 14) such as skin and eye color, hair texture, and facial features.

Mixed race is a broad term used to describe people whose ancestries come from multiple races. Biracial refers specifically to people with only two different races in their heritages (e.g. black and white). Multiracial refers specifically to people with two or more races (e.g. white, black, and Native American.
(Douglas, 2012, p. ix)

Until recently, theorizing around racial identity for persons with multiple racial heritages was limited to persons of African American/European American heritage, reflecting the tendency toward viewing race as a black-white binary. According to Kato (2000) “traditionally, ‘biracial,’ was a term used to describe persons of black and white parentage. Today, the term ‘multiracial’ is often used” (p. 37) to indicate a more inclusive conceptualization. Changing to the prefix “multi” was intended as a move away from the black-white binary in order to communicate that “multiracial” means that the person could have racial heritages from any combination of racial categories and possibly more than two categories. However, the distinction between “bi” and “multi” often seems lost in social discourse that sees white as the norm and all others as outside that norm (Lund, 2010; Kendall, 2002), bringing the term “multiracial” back to binary thinking.

Drawing on the work of Thornton and Wason (1995), Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado (2009) identified four approaches to theorizing racial identity development of individuals with multiple racial heritages: the problem approach, the equivalent approach, the variant approach, and the ecological approach (pp. 15-16). In other words, according to Rockquemore et al. (2009), theorists and society have told four broad social/cultural narratives about racial identity for persons with multiple racial heritages. The first three approaches are characterized as “stage models” with individuals moving through predictable stages of development resulting in a particular identity outcome. The fourth, the ecological approach, takes the position that there are no predictable stages and more than one healthy identity outcome is possible. These approaches loosely align with what Root (2003a) has identified as “three contemporary generations of mixed raced persons currently [in existence]”: the exotic, the vanguard, and the biracial boomer (pp. 111-112).

Thinking narratively I am reminded that there are experiences and stories to live by—both personal and societal stories—that have given rise to and have been shaped by the complex ways society has conceptualized race. These narratives are rooted within the social contexts of the time and have changed as contexts have changed. I am also reminded that continuity of experience means there are no clearly drawn lines that separate these narratives into discrete single entities in a particular moment in time. Continuity of experiences means that these narratives live on and exist simultaneously, bumping against each other, shaping social and personal stories to live by in our past, present, and future as a society and as individual members of society. However, for

practical purposes, my presentation of these narratives follows Rockquemore et al.'s (2009) framework and the associated historical time periods.

Pre-Civil Rights Era – The “Problem” Narrative

Prior to the civil rights era, the predominant narrative told about persons with multiple racial heritages grew out of a belief that anyone with African heritage was morally and intellectually inferior to whites. Having multiple racial heritages was storied as problematic, and it was thought that these persons must accept an inferior social position and face stigmatization and rejection from monoracial members of society, both black and white. This, what Rockquemore, et al. (2009) termed the “problem approach” grew out of the Jim Crow era and is associated with Park’s (1928) idea of the marginal man, “a mixed blood, like the Mullaatto in the United States or the Eurasian in Asia . . . [who] lives in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less of a stranger” (p. 893) and as a result lives in a state of perpetual confusion. From this theoretical viewpoint, persons with multiple racial heritages are fated to experience an ongoing and unresolved crisis of identity (Rockquemore et al., 2009). Drawing on the work of Stonequist (1935; 1937), Rockquemore et al. (2009) explained,

the marginal man undergoes three predicable stages of the life cycle some assimilation into the two cultures of his parents followed by a crisis stages, where the individual has one or more defining experiences that indicate the irreconcilable nature of the cultural conflict that marks his existence finally he adjusts to his status and the full understanding of his social location. (p. 16).

In the United States, the “social location” for person with multiple racial heritages was to either become a leader among blacks or be forced into a state of alienation and isolation (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p. 17).

The roots of this narrative are intimately tied to the enslavement of African Americans for economic gain and the accompanying legal maneuvering placing blacks at the bottom of social, political, and economic life. One such legal maneuver, the 1857 *Dred Scott* case, in which the Supreme Court decided “blacks were not citizens and could not claim to be free when they traveled to and settled in free states” (Hobbs, 2014, p. 107). Persons with multiple racial heritages were considered black, thus being forced into living a story not consistent with the entirety of their racial heritages. Actions such as these on the part of the legal system within the white social structures, I imagine, shaped the stories told about persons with multiple racial heritages. These stories, combined with indignities visited upon African Americans and the decision on the part of some light-skinned blacks to “pass”⁸ as freemen and freewomen, likely shaped their stories to live by.

African Americans, those with single and multiple racial heritages, experienced a respite from such legal entanglements as a result of Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction Era—1865 to 1877—that followed the Civil War. Blacks began to compose and tell new stories to live by.

They demanded that whites address them as Mr. and Mrs. Women dressed in

brightly colored clothes, carried parasols, rode in carriages, refused to give way to

⁸ Pass or passing is a term used to describe the practice of some light-skinned or racially ambiguous African Americans, usually of multiple racial heritages, of either presenting themselves as white or allowing others to assume they were white. This practice was situated within a view of racial categories as separate and distinct with the assumption that whiteness meant being exclusively or purely of white heritage.

whites on the street, and sat in with whites on street cars. Men carried guns and bought dogs and liquor, all of which had been forbidden under slavery. Restricted in their ability to move about during slavery, freedmen and freedwomen exhibited a passion for travel. (Wormser, 2003, p. 2)

In addition, they voted, were elected to public office at the federal, state, and local levels, and many secured government employment (Hobbs, 2014).

However, these changes were contested by the white power structure of the South, and African Americans were subjected to humiliations, indignities, intimidation, violence, and erosions of legal and civil rights. Hobbs (2014) described this moment in time, the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction as

an important turning point in the history of racial ideology. This period was America's first experiment in creating a "postracial" society These heady times—when the prospect of being both black and a citizen existed—were nothing short of revolutionary, but this period was also fleeting and marred by violence. (p. 74).

The United States Supreme Court failed to uphold the rights of blacks and African Americans when, in 1883, it ruled the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which guaranteed equal treatment in hotels, trains, and other public spaces, was unconstitutional. This was followed by the 1896 Landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that upheld Louisiana's law requiring blacks and whites to travel in separate train cars thus enshrining the separate but equal doctrine. The "Court—which several years earlier had ruled that a state did not have the power to forbid segregation—now decided a state had the power to require it" (Wormser, 2003, p. 99). This decision brought a close to the

Reconstruction Era and heralded in the Jim Crow Era of discrimination and segregation based on race and skin color.

It became increasingly necessary to create “definitions of Blackness . . . in part because of state laws making interracial marriage illegal . . . including some states where laws specifically targeted marriages between Blacks and Whites” (Roth, 2005, p. 38). Failure to abide by these laws could result in arrest, imprisonment, or death. Connected with these anti-miscegenation laws was the codification of the “one-drop-rule” that sprang from the idea that “a person could only have one race” (Roth, 2005, p. 38), again legally situating anyone with a “drop” of African American blood as a member of the black race. Additionally, efforts to “replicate slavery’s racial hierarchy and reestablish the subordination of African Americans” (Stevenson, 2014, p. 28) included the repeal of voting rights that were established during Reconstruction, heightened racist rhetoric, lynchings, and “forced sterilization of poor and minority women” (Stevenson, 2014, p. 28). Sterilizations were intended to preserve the supposed purity of the white race, as were lynchings, which were, purportedly, intended to protect white women from African American men who were storied as black barbarians who could not control their sexual urges. Lynchings were often public displays of brutality intended to terrorize and intimidate.

The mob sliced his body with knives, burned his body with red hot irons, hung him by the neck until he almost choked to death, then revived him and continued the torture. Next they dragged him to the home of the victim’s parents where several thousand people were waiting. When they stopped in front of the house, a woman came out and plunged a butcher knife into his heart. (Wormser, 2003, pp. 74-75)

Black men were often lynched for raping white women however, “many of the so-called lynchings for rape were cover-ups for voluntary interracial sexual relations” (Wormser, 2003, p. 128).

Every Negro lynched is called a big burly brute when many had white men as fathers and are not only not black, but are sufficiently attractive to white girls of culture and refinement to fall in love with them. Don't ever think your women will remain pure while you are debauching ours. You sow the seed. The harvest will come in due time. (Wormser, 2003, p. 85)

A wave of white supremacist ideology, with seeds in Southern political, economic, and racist rhetoric and practices, spread throughout the South and the North, and were expressed in violent attacks against blacks and other groups seen as a threat to white racial purity. The Ku Klux Klan “spread . . . to every state in the South and included mayors, judges, and sheriffs, as well as convicted criminals” (Wormser, 2003, p. 22). White supremacist ideology was also promulgated through propaganda that situated non-whites as “other”; even “respected academics claimed that the Negro was inferior biologically, psychologically, anthropologically, culturally, and historically, despite the fact that there was overwhelming evidence to the contrary” (Wormser, 2003, p. 103). This viewpoint and the accompanying “negrophobia” were justified “as a response to the so-called regression of blacks toward bestiality. Freedom, they claimed, had made the black a savage creature” (Wormser, 2003, p. 107).

These conditions placed blacks and persons with multiple racial heritages in precarious positions socially and economically, and “light-skinned blacks had plenty of reasons to pass” (Hobbs, 2014, p. 125), including,

the pleasures of sitting in other sections of the movie theater besides the “buzzard roost,” to the simple dignities of trying on a hat in a store without being

compelled to buy it, to the elusive opportunity to “feel more like a man” or “to be treated like a lady”. (Hobbs, 2014, p. 159)

Some who chose to pass did so exclusively for the purpose of securing employment during the day then returning to their families in the evenings. Others chose to completely sever their ties to their families, relocate to other parts of the country, marry whites, and in some cases change their names (Hobbs, 2014). This often exacted “psychic tolls” (Hobbs, 2014, p. 119) on the person passing and their family members; “some buckled under the fear of being discovered, others experienced a ‘strange longing’ for black people and black culture” (Hobbs, 2014, p. 161).

It seems apparent that any problems of identity that erupted or persisted for persons with multiple racial heritages during this time period were not a result of any presumed genetic shortcomings or mental failings due to racial mixing. On the contrary, I imagine, that the experience of living in a social and legal structure that simultaneously denigrated their black heritage and denied their white heritage held the potential to shape their stories to live by in ways that reflected this tension. Their “marginality” in society was not due to anything inherent in their biological or psychological make up, rather it was a result of their social placement by those in privileged positions.

Civil Rights Era and Black Power Movement – The “Equivalent” Narrative

We should begin by remembering America—not just the South—in that moment just before the Civil Rights Movement began. It was a time when, nearly a century after the Emancipation Proclamation, millions of Americans, through no fault of their own, had become the children of neo-slavery. They were native sons and daughters, but they were completely disenfranchised in the land of the free and the home of the brave . . . All the powers of the state itself—its police power allied with its judicial power, with the federal government conveniently looking the other way—were used to suppress black people politically, educationally, socially, and economically, keeping them as

marginally literate chattel—neither slaves nor citizens. (Halberstam, 2004, p. xvii)

It was in this moment, the late 1920s to early 1930s, that Park and Stonequist looked at the social and historical contexts of life for persons with multiple racial heritages and articulated the marginal man theory. This was the dominant narrative being lived and told at the time, but other stories, counterstories also were being lived and told. One of the most influential and powerfully situated voices of counterstories was that of Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was elected to the United States presidency in 1932. Mrs. Roosevelt used her position as First Lady to bring attention to issues she considered important, one of which was civil rights. She began to speak out publicly against race prejudice. She supported anti-lynching campaigns and anti-poll tax⁹ measures. She attended conferences with black speakers and spoke out urging justice and greater equality for blacks. She became a go-between between civil rights activists and the President, despite opposition to her efforts by many of Roosevelt's pro-Southern White House staff. (Wormser, 2003, pp. 146-147)

The Jim Crow structure was beginning to erode as the voices of “whites and blacks, Southerners and Northerners, politicians and clergymen, ordinary citizens and civil rights leaders” (Wormser, 2003, p. 156) mingled with Mrs. Roosevelt's call for an end to segregation and discrimination against blacks. These voices were attempting to replace narratives of inferiority and marginality with narratives of equality and inclusion.

After World War II—a war fought to push back antidemocratic, fascist, imperialistic, racist forces—voices in the United States began to call for a “more just,

⁹ Poll taxes were fees levied as a requirement to vote in public elections. African Americans were often unable to pay the fee and were, therefore, unable to vote.

more decent society” (Halberstam, 2004, p. xxi). However, stories of white supremacy persisted, and those telling those stories continued to reinforce them with discriminatory practices, intimidation, and violence. Clashes between supporters of white supremacy and civil rights advocates erupted.

When I moved to Chicago and started working for the Defender in 1946, my first story was covering a race riot at the Airport Homes project, where a mob tried to kill some black veterans.

Chicago had a legal provision called “restrictive covenants”—clauses inserted in housing contracts and deeds and signed by a majority of the members of a community—that committed them not to sell, rent, or lease said property to people of the Negro race (or, in some instances, to Orientals or Jews). The covenants were mostly directed at blacks, and because the community had made them contractual, they became legally binding.

Black people were therefore restricted to little pockets of the city, jammed on top of each other. Chicago was about to explode. Black people were moving out because they just could not take the torment. Panic usually struck when the first black moved into a nonrestricted block that was all white. The word would go out—“The niggers are coming!!--and a mob would gather in front of your apartment or your house.

One black veteran—he’d had some ribs shot away in Italy—was about to move into Airport Homes, and I was there the evening he turned in his lease. A mob gathered and chased the veterans and the journalists, white and black, up into the second floor of a duplex.

They had their little kids with them and they was chanting, “Niggers go home! Niggers go home!” They tried to set fire to the building. One black veteran got on the phone and called the police station. He said, “You got some cops standing around out here chanting with these people. They’re trying to kill us, and it’s getting dark!”

The veteran on the phone told the cops, “I’m going to my car to get my switchblade. If you don’t have these cops give me some protection, somebody’s going to get hurt.” That’s when the cops standing there with the mob came up and led us through. They escorted us to our cars because they thought that veteran would really kill someone.

When we got in the car, I heard all the crap I used to tolerate growing up in Paris, Tennessee; “You niggers think you can come out here and get our white women!” In the South, nobody ever spit on me, but at Airport Homes, they did.

Some white women were part of our group as observers; they had thought it would be a nice little thing. The mob was hysterical over that. They were shouting at those white girls: “Which one of these niggers you going to fuck tonight?” (Jarrett, 2004, pp. 40-42).

This story of Vernon Jarrett embodies the fear, hatred, discrimination, segregation, and violence that white supremacist ideology engendered. It also illustrates how segregationist policies and practices were and are instrumental in the silencing of voices—the refusal of those in privileged positions to hear, or care about, the stories to live by of those pushed to the margins. When people do not live in close proximity to each other or interact through living side-by-side in their daily lives, the likelihood of viewing others with loving eyes, playfully entering into relationships, and “world” – travelling (Lugones, 1987) is diminished. When isolated or segregated from others, the tendency to view them with arrogance, coupled with a growing fear of the “other”—the person who is not like you, the person whose life stories and “world” (Lugones, 1987) you do not understand—gives rise to self-protective behaviors and behaviors that are damaging and hurtful to the “other”.

The challenge, as Williams (2004) explained, is

every American . . . has to figure out how to deal with people who are rich and poor; people who were born here and those who are newly arrived; people who are descendants of the *Mayflower* passengers and those whose ancestors came here as slaves. There is no getting away from this quandary . . . The story of how each one of us struggles to deal with “the other” is the great American adventure. (p. 2)

Those with privilege who segregate the “other” also segregate themselves. While amassing the spoils of privilege—such as power, influence, economic wealth, material

possessions—the privileged deprive themselves of a richer understanding of human life and human experience. The privileged create a world in which they and those they perceive as “other” are unable to hear each other’s stories, perpetuating and magnifying a lack of understanding.

When my family moved into Crown Heights, a neighborhood in transition, you could sense the whites’ fear of black people. They steadily left the neighborhood, and their children left the schools. At my schools . . . the top students were mostly white, even though the student body had become mostly black. After-school fights usually involved the black kids on the lowest academic track . . . And when the police arrived, they often led away poor black kids. I could see the predominant white attitude in my schoolbooks. History texts either didn’t mention black people or mentioned them in passing as primitives and slaves. On television, in the movies, and in newspapers, white affluence and power and celebration of white beauty abounded. I didn’t have to be told as a child that whites viewed blacks as a scourge. I could see it everywhere in action. (Williams, 2004, p. 7)

Living in the same neighborhood with, or being in close proximity to, a black person was considered, by many whites, to be socially unacceptable and physically dangerous. This story was simultaneously composed by and reinforced by segregation laws that drew legal boundaries delineating where blacks could and could not live. It is a story that continues to live in the white consciousness. I am reminded of an experience from my teenage years that both pushes against and reinforces this story.

Even though Kendra came to my elementary school in eighth grade, she really didn’t enter my life until freshman year of high school when we were selected for the same cheerleading squad and placed next to each other in the cheer-line by the cheerleading sponsor.

One day, during our junior year, several of us were in a car (driven by the mom of one of the other cheerleaders) going home after a sporting event. The first stop was Kendra’s house. Kendra’s family lived in what was referred to as the “black part of town”. The mom driving the car hit a curb, which resulted in a flat tire. We were just a few blocks from Kendra’s house so she walked home to get her dad to change the tire. After the tire was repaired and Kendra and her father had gone home, the mom turned to us and told us to not tell our parents. Then she turned to her daughter and told her to NEVER tell her dad what had happened.

It was obvious to me, and I imagine to the rest of girls, that the reason she demanded our silence was that we “didn’t belong” in that part of town—a part of town thought to be dangerous—and she was afraid that our parents and her husband would be angry with her for taking us there and risking our safety.

The mom driving the car, by simply taking us into Kendra’s neighborhood, pushed against the stereotypes about the dangers of the “black part of town.” She was willing to tell a different story to the girls in her car. However, the dominant story of danger and fear pushed back and was expressed in her unwillingness to take the risk of telling that story to our parents or her husband. I imagine that she felt great tension in this situation.

In my reliving of this story I am reminded of my own conflicted feelings. I did not have to be told by my fellow cheerleader’s mother that we were in a situation deemed by others to be dangerous. The perceived danger of that area of town was communicated to me explicitly and implicitly in my home. I knew I was not allowed to go there on my own, although I had been there multiple times with my parents when they went to work on a rental house that they owned. There were times when we would visit with the tenants and their neighbors as if we were old friends, and I recall my siblings and I playing with the children in the neighborhood. Yet, there were times when criticism of tenants around late rent payments or the lack of cleanliness of an apartment seemed to be attributed to a group rather than individual failing. So, although my experiences had communicated contradictory messages about the “black part of town” and the people who lived there, I knew instinctively which one carried more weight within my social and familial world. The weight of that dominant message also came into direct conflict with what I knew about Kendra; I knew her to be sweet, kind, caring, friendly, and fun to be around. I certainly was not afraid of her. Looking backward with my adult and more

experienced eyes I wonder if the mom who was driving the car had lived similarly incongruent experiences as I; I think it likely. I also think it likely that she and I both felt the weight of social pressure and we both succumbed—she in her admonishment and I in my compliance.

As I look at the stories of the black veteran wanting to move his family into the Airport Homes project in Chicago, the young boy whose family moved to Crown Heights in Brooklyn, New York, my story of the “black part of town, and lay them next to stories of slavery, segregation, discrimination, lynchings, and passing, I see a process of constructing borders between people. These are social and cultural borders manifested in and reinforced by geographical borders. The crossing of any of these borders has the potential to be emotionally, psychologically, and physically dangerous. The border crossing of the black veteran in the Chicago housing project and the black family in Brooklyn, New York brought the risk of any and all of these dangers. The border crossing of a car full of white cheerleaders into the “black part of town” in the mid-1970s did not bring us into physical danger; that fear was unfounded. The fear in that situation arose as we crossed back into our own social domain. This was the emotional and psychological fear of societal disapproval, which is quite possibly more paralyzing than the fear of physical harm.

Those with privilege, those who may have been instrumental in creating the border, may reinforce the border by crossing it to reassert power and privilege.

My Dad taught us growing up that no man was any better than any other man. We recognized that Mississippi in those days was not part of the United States of America.

What got my attention that things need to change happened one day in Dublin, Mississippi, in 1948, when I was 12.

Dublin was built along the railroad tracks and had a little town square with all the main stores. White folks lived on one side of the tracks and black folks lived on the other. So we had demarcation of the community.

The square had a canopy over it, and there was the “loafers’ bench” where people could sit and congregate. You could walk across to the post office, which was built on the other side of the tracks—the black side. Every Saturday the rich town boss would walk over to the post office, get his mail, and go back home.

On one occasion there was a black man—God bless his heart, I know not his name—but the rich white town boss approached with his two daughters up the sidewalk, and the black man didn’t stop for him. All the rest of the folks were looking as to what he was going to do. The white boss got within 10 feet of this black man and addressed him: “Nigger, get off the sidewalk!”

The black man stood there. The third time he addressed him, the rich white man said, “Do you know who I am?”

And the black man said, yes, he knew who he was, but he didn’t see getting off the sidewalk and into the street to let him pass. He said, “This sidewalk looks big enough for both of us.”

The town boss did not say a word. He turned around and took his daughters with him and went back to his house, got his gun and came back and shot the black man, and kicked his body off the sidewalk into the gutter. He then dragged the body into the street and called the sheriff. And nothing was ever done about it. (Epps, 2004, pp. 19-21)

The tensions that erupted as blacks and whites pushed against and buttressed the borders set the stage “in the postwar years...for a showdown over race relations Blacks and progressive whites were assaulting Jim Crow at every opportunity” (Wormser, 2003, p. 165), seeking to “undo the darkest chapter in American history: that of slavery” (Halberstam, 2004, p. xx). It was within this context that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s was born. Although the movement began in the hearts and minds of people, many mark the beginning with *Brown v. Topeka, Kansas Board of Education*—the landmark Supreme Court decision that found the “separate but equal” doctrine to be

unconstitutional in education “destroying the legal rationale for Jim Crow” (Wormser, 2003, p. 183).

After years of struggle, Civil Rights leaders began to realize that black activists were traumatized by the persistent degradation, physical violence, and “assaults on their sense of personal worth” (Williams, 2004, p. 11). These traumas were the result of participating in actions such as the Montgomery bus boycott, the March on Washington, lunch counter sit-ins, freedom rides, and attempts to integrate public schools. Activists were met with physical violence and verbal abuse, but, because they had chosen a stance of non-violence, they were unable to retaliate. Furthermore, retaliation would have increased the possibility of injury or death at the hands of those attempting to maintain power and privilege over them. This dynamic created feelings of anger, frustration, and increased disempowerment (Poussaint, 2004, p. 131). The need to address this issue gave rise to the Black Power Movement within the Civil Rights Movement.

J. Edgar Hoover put the counterintelligence program in place. He was afraid of Dr. King, but he was also mostly afraid about black revolutionaries being the big threat to the country. He felt the Black Power folk would capture the momentum. That’s when Hoover started talking about having to neutralize black leadership.

Ebony magazine called me and said, “Will you please give me some insight on what all this ‘black consciousness’ stuff is about that came out of Mississippi?” I wrote that a big problem for blacks in the movement in Mississippi was that they felt they had internalized racism; they felt inferior. As an example, if white workers in Mississippi called a rally in a black church for 8 p.m., many black people would show up. But if a black organizer called the same rally, few showed up. It was like if a white person was endorsing it, they’re powerful and “I’m gonna go.”

We had to begin to purge black people of this internalized racism and make them feel black and proud. That’s why we switched to the word “black” and took away the word “Negro”—to get away from the negative. “Black” was a derogatory word back then, but we were going to turn that around and make it a positive word. We also felt that blacks had to learn how to organize and do

things for themselves because they had been so downtrodden and dependent. The way to do this was to raise their consciousness and make them feel that they could achieve and gain power, that they didn't have to be dependent and disenfranchised.

It was a way of trying to mobilize the black community. And it worked.
(Poussaint, 2004, p. 133)

The “equivalent approach” to theorizing racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages emerged during this time period, the late 1950s to early 1960s (Rockquemore et al., 2009), when members of Root’s (2003a) exotic generation were being born and growing into adulthood. This generation

could not publicly declare a mixed race identity without being thought to be confused, disturbed, or self-hating. The civil rights movement further required solidarity, and a mixed race identity was not perceived as being in solidarity with any of the racial pride movements. (Root, 2003a, p.111)

Theories within the “equivalent approach” posit that the only healthy identity resolution for persons with multiple racial heritages, with one of those heritages being African American, is to take on a stable black identity. Generally, these theories predict that individuals will move through stages beginning in childhood when there is a lack of recognition of race, through experiences of racism, and then into an acceptance and valuing of a black identity (Rockquemore et al., 2009).

Post Civil Rights Era -- The “Variant” and “Ecological” Narratives

Successes such as the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which “ended segregation in a host of public accommodations” (Patterson, 2016, para. 15), the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Supreme Court’s decision in *Loving v. Virginia* overturning anti-miscegenetic laws were accompanied by increased resistance and violence. The

stresses described by Pouissant (Williams, 2004, pp. 129-133) took a toll on the Civil Rights Movement, and “by 1965...[it] was growing fragmented, less interracial, and less committed to nonviolence” (Patterson, 2016, para. 18). These factors, combined with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, and increased public and political attention on the Vietnam War dissipated the movement (Patterson, 2016, para. 19).

Root’s (2003a) vanguard generation of persons with multiple racial heritages was born during this time period—between the late 1960s and late 1970s. As this generation was coming of age from the mid-1980s through the 1990s, the “variant approach” to theorizing racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages was put forth. It was suggested that these individuals would grapple with

five major psychosocial tasks: (a) conflicts about their dual racial/ethnic identity, (b) conflicts about their social marginality, (c) conflicts about their sexuality and choice of sexual partners, (d) conflicts about separation from their parents, and (e) conflicts about their educational and career aspirations. (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p. 18).

There was an assumption that these tasks would contribute to “an integrated ‘biracial’ or ‘multiracial’ identity” (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p 18), which was considered the only healthy racial identity resolution. However, according to Root (2003a), this generation found that “public declaration of mixed race identity was discouraged but situationally declared nevertheless” (p. 112).

The struggle for equality has continued well after the Civil Rights Movement—“the social order was still structured in ways that encouraged assumptions of black

inferiority, and people who held . . . racist views . . . had only to look around them to find evidence that appeared to confirm their beliefs” (de Jong, 2010, p. 53). As the hard-won legal success of the movement were challenged and eroded, civil rights advocates continued to fight for justice. Paralleling the federal government’s retreat from civil rights laws passed during the Reconstruction Era, the Nixon and Reagan administrations began the federal government’s move to step back from the civil rights legislation passed during the Johnson administration in the 1960s. The Reagan administration “weakened enforcement efforts by cutting the budgets and staff of government agencies that were responsible for ensuring equal treatment for nonwhite people . . . [relying] on voluntary compliance by local governments, federal agencies, and private citizens” (de Jong, 2010, p. 55). Without the support of the federal government, people were left to their own devices to fight against a persistent legacy of Jim Crow laws that negatively impacted the daily lives of African Americans. Governmental bodies and businesses targeted black neighborhoods as locations for landfills and industries that polluted the environment; a “tough on crime” movement coupled with stereotypes that linked African Americans to crime dramatically increased the prison population with disproportionately high representation of black males; and states and school districts were able to forestall desegregation or resegregate schools either through manipulative tactics or as the result of a collection of court decisions (de Jong, 2010).

The biggest challenge has been racism. In my childhood, not everyone could tell that I was black, but it was clear to most that I was not white. My non-whiteness was a big problem in my community. When people figured out or heard about who I actually was (or the part that counted, anyway), then I became a definite target. The questions about my identity stopped, and the aggression began. So you know I had the full gamut of experiences—name-calling, violence, lost opportunities because of racism A lot of people don’t understand that it’s much easier to understand more obvious types of racism. Often, people of color

will feel the insult but they might not be able to clearly describe what the problem is. This can be more damaging than more obvious forms of racism because it affects how you feel inside. It is harder to challenge, and it becomes difficult to believe your gut instinct if you have felt insulted but you can't even explain why. (Sanchez-Tieu, 2012, p. 8)

Systematized discrimination and injustices became much more covert in the post-civil rights era as opposed to during the Jim Crow era. It was masked by voices that told stories of African Americans as lazy and violent therefore responsible for their failure to succeed. This provided cover for the reality that, in the 1990s, the United States was “a nation that talk[ed] about democratic ideals and racial justice but where only white people had nice houses and political power” (Williams, 2004, p. 8). Day-to-day expressions of racial biases and prejudices also became covert. Rather than being expressed in direct aggressive acts such as legalized segregation, lynchings, and verbal abuse, they became microaggressions,

brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group . . . [which are] often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures and tones. These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversation and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous. (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273)

As demonstrated by microaggressions, the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement seem to have, in some respects, driven racism and racist behaviors into the shadows during the post-civil rights era. Microaggressions illustrate a more subterranean aspect to racism and expressions of racist thinking than was previously the case. With acts of racism, for a time, out of the public eye, some felt comfortable proclaiming that

race is no longer an issue in the United States—after all, we elected a black president. This position implies that any failure on the part of blacks to be successful socially and economically is exclusively due to individual shortcomings, not a result of structural or institutionalized racism.

At the same time, the definition and nature of racism came into question with some viewing it “as a systemic problem that had broad implications for the whole society and [others] who defined it in terms of personal prejudices that were of relatively little importance” (de Jong, 2010, p. 99). Disagreement arose as to whether a person of color could or could not be a racist. For example, those who say that a black person cannot be racist might take the following position:

Racism is about prejudice and power. It includes the ability to access resources, being able to control it and decide who is restricted from it. It is whiteness (not blackness), which has formed a globalized power structure (this doesn't have to be material resources) Moreover, it is not black people who created racial categories. White people enjoy higher-paying jobs, better educational outcomes; have lower rates of unemployment because they don't suffer racism and prejudice. (Riaz & Chisholm, 2014)

On the other hand, a person who believes a black person can be racist might take this position:

I know that racism has a history based on systemic structure and racial hierarchies. How can a race that is oppressed and face such prejudice be guilty of racism? . . . I've seen black people discriminate against someone because of the colour of their skin. I've heard derogatory comments about the white partner of a black person. I've heard derogatory comments about Asian people from black people, and vice versa. Black people, like everyone else, can be prejudiced and bigoted. The fact that these comments are being made and someone is facing prejudice because of their skin colour or race makes it such. What is that if not racism? (Riaz & Chisholm, 2014)

It certainly is not surprising that a consensus does not exist about the definition of racism when no agreement exists around the concept of race itself.

This lack of consensus can also be seen in discussions that arose around the idea of “blackness” and “whiteness”. Some persons of color are seen as more black and others as more white, or less black. Kinder and Dale-Riddle (2012) provide the examples of General Colin Powell and former President Barack Obama, both of whom have multiple racial heritages. According to Kinder and Dale-Riddle (2012), when General Powell was considering a run for the presidency in the late 1990s, Powell seemed to “rise above race...for a bundle of reasons. He is of Jamaican heritage. He is light-skinned. He speaks ‘like a white person.’ He is a Republican. He does not use his prominence as a platform to push liberal policies” (pp. 167-168). Conversely, when Barack Obama was running for the presidency in 2008, Kinder and Dale Riddle (2012) identified “a substantial racial divide, a big effect of racial group solidarity among blacks, and a big effect of racial resentment among whites” (p. 167). President Obama is known for his eloquent speeches, and it is likely that many would judge that he “speaks like a white person”; however, in many other ways he is unlike General Powell. President Obama is of African heritage, he is darker-skinned, he is a Democrat, and he advocates a liberal political agenda. This suggests that society’s conception of race and racial categories morph as social and political contexts change. It also suggests that racial categorizations imposed by society have something to do with behavior and beliefs in addition to ancestry, skin color, hair texture, and facial features.

At the time General Powell was at the height of his public life, multiracial activists challenged the one-drop rule and argued that mixed-race people should be officially recognized on the 2000 census. In 1997, the U.S. Census Bureau’s policy changed for the first time in almost eighty years to allow

individuals to “mark one or more” categories. Numerous mixed-race organizations, magazines, college classes, and websites appeared and began to garner greater public attention. (Hobbs, 2014, p. 275)

Persons with multiple racial heritages began to come into the public eye, especially in the entertainment industry, and, as with the U.S. Census, their racial identity choices within the broader social discourse expanded—a multiple racial heritage was no longer seen as unacceptable (Hobbs, 2014).

It was in this context that the latest theoretical approach—the “ecological approach” developed. It recognizes multiple healthy identity outcomes and that racial identity may shift within different contexts and in response to social and cultural factors as well as during different phases of life. Ecological models move away from conceptualizing racial identity development as occurring within predictable stages (Rockquemore et al., 2009). This approach is most often associated with Root’s model in which she identified five possible healthy outcomes: “accept the monoracial identity society assigns actively choose a monoracial identity (congruent with the identity society would assign) define self as biracial or multiracial. . . . develop a ‘new race’ identity [or] the declaration of a White identity with simultaneous attachment to and detachment from one’s heritage of color” (Root, 2003a, pp. 115-116). In addition, this model recognizes that “gender, regional history of race relations, class, and generation” (Root, 2003a, p. 116) influence racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages. This is a recognition of the importance of the personal, social, and temporal aspects of all human experiences in the shaping of stories to live by. Root’s (2003a) biracial boomer generation, born after 1980 and currently in their mid-20s to

mid-30s grew up during the time of the development of this theoretical approach. For these individuals, “claiming a White identity, though uncommon, is not necessarily associated with maladjustment” (Root, 2003a, p. 112).

Missing the Particularities and Complexities

These four social cultural narratives expressed in different theories regarding racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages remind me of Greene’s (1995) notion of seeing small and seeing big. She tells us,

to see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face. (p. 10)

Looking at the racial identity development of persons with multiple racial heritages through the lens of any, or even all, of these theoretical approaches is to see these persons as small. They overlook the particularities and complexities of individual experiences as they attempt to consolidate and generalize, making the assumption that all experiences of having multiple racial heritages can be distilled down to essential characteristics.

The ecological approach to theorizing racial identity development is a step toward seeing big. It acknowledges that there are aspects of individuality (such as gender, regional history of race relations, class, and generation) and multiplicity (with its five

possible healthy identity resolutions) present in the experience of persons with multiple racial heritages. It is consistent with research that tends to support an understanding of racial identity development of persons with multiple racial heritages as a varied process in which resolutions are diverse and often fluid, sometimes changing throughout the course of life and from context to context. For example, Miville, Constantine, Baysden, and So-Lloyd (2005), Renn (2000; 2004 cited in Renn, 2008), and Hitlin, Scott Brown, and Elder (2006) all found that persons with multiple racial heritages do not follow a predictable path toward a single and common racial identity.

Miville et al., (2005) employed multiple semistructured interviews of ten “self-identified multiracial individuals from a variety of mixed racial backgrounds . . . 20-54 years of age” (p. 509). Their participants described “critical periods” or stages with peers that had a significant impact on their racial identity until they reached “late adolescence and young adulthood” when they experienced “greater freedom and flexibility” in their racial identity options (p. 514).

At one point in my life, trying to understand who I was became very conflicting. I didn't know what race I was, what box I belonged in, or if I was being true to myself or not. At times I felt isolated, like there was no one else in the world like me.

My racial identity is a combination of three races: Caucasian, African, and Native American. I have accepted a part of each race: therefore, I don't classify myself as one in particular. (Lorza, 2012a, pp. 40-41)

Renn (2008) “identified five identity patterns among biracial and multiracial college students”: monoracial identity, multiple monoracial identities, multiracial identity; extraracial identity; and situational identity (pp. 16-17).

Many people assume that children born mixed race grow up to be confused, lost, and isolated. This is true for some, but for others being mixed leads to

exploration. Knowing where you come from helps you decide where you may want to go and unlocks mysteries long forgotten or kept secret.

Racism and oppression still thrive in the present, and mixed-race people are not excluded from racism. In fact, being mixed generally adds even more challenges, such as guilt, self-hate, and pressure to fit in. Even in the multicultural environment that many grew up with, mixed-race people may face discrimination from all sides and all angles.

We live in a world where people often categorize each other based on skin color and features. How can someone of two or more races feel comfortable in a single box when parts of who they are don't fit? The reality is that it's time for nonmixed people and systems to stop trying to fit us into racial categories and just accept the fact that we are not one race but many—or, as I like to say, we are many races that create ONE. STOP TRYING TO FIT US IN. (Lorza, 2012b, p. 2)

And, in their five year study of over twenty thousand United States students in grades seven through twelve, Hitlin et al., (2006) found that while some students' racial identities stayed constant (as either monoracial or multiracial) during the period between adolescence and young adulthood others shifted in a variety of ways.

These studies support an ecological view of racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages, recognizing a life course aspect, which focuses explicitly on the patterning of lives as individuals make status transitions (e.g. from child to adolescent, adolescent to young adult, young adult to adult) while embedding such transitioning within the forces of history, social spaces, institutional arrangements, economic conditions, and racialized social structures. (Rockquemore et al., 2009, p. 22)

In addition, some of these studies also provide insights into the process and factors (such as phenotype, cultural knowledge, and peer relations) through which racial identity is developed (see Renn, 2004; Root, 2003b; Wallace, 2003, Wijeyesinghe, 2001),

supporting a “person-environment psychosocial process” (Renn, 2008, p. 17; see also Baxley, 2008, p. 231).

We arrived at my workplace, but the cab driver told me to wait in the cab a minute because there was a dangerous person standing by the entrance. Confused, I look out the window only to see my co-worker. I told the cab driver it was all right and that we worked together. He just looked at me, shocked: “You work with Indians?” I told him that I work for a Native world-renowned company known for our performing talents, beautiful regalia, and entrancing music, and that I was sorry he didn’t understand. “Why would you work there? You’re not Native,” he told me.

It was shocking to me that he would ever say such a thing, and that things like this still happen. “What is a ‘Native’ supposed to look like?” I asked.

He looked at me with a peculiar smile and said, “Dark hair, dark skin, and dark eyes; you’re definitely white.” I slammed the car door. Up until that point, I never doubted who I was and what I believed. Do hair, skin, and eye color really define a person, or is it their rich identity, teachings, stories, and their connection to mother earth? I believe there is more to me than just the color of my complexion and eyes, despite what others might think. (McCue, 2012, pp. 10-11).

Returning to the need to see big in order to understand individual experiences in their complexity and multiplicity, it is important to move past the categories of race and the theorized possible racial identities available to persons with multiple racial heritages. Stories to live by are not shaped by a single aspect of a person’s experience. They are shaped by the totality of their experiences in the past, present, and future, and by personal, social, and contextual factors.

To enter a narrative inquiry into their experiences and stories to live by I must take an expansive and imaginative view, “because of all of our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinction and definitions” (Greene, 1995, p. 3). By coming to the inquiry relationship with a playful (Lugones,

1987) and imaginative (Greene, 1995) spirit I hope to see big (Greene, 1995), to see the peripheral (Bateson, 1994), and to co-compose an inquiry into wonderings about physical appearance, gender, social class, economic status, interests, skills, beliefs, family, friends, community, society, home, school, workplaces, and public spaces of persons with multiple racial heritages.

“What pretty hair! Such lovely color! All mixed people are so beautiful! You people are so sexy and exotic.”

This attention may seem flattering at first, but once you have heard it again and again, it starts to get frustrating. While part of our ID is based on appearance, there is much more than meets the eye. Our identity is much more complicated. It is beyond being judged by how we look and includes the same issues as everyone else’s—issues such as how we feel about our looks, accepting ourselves, fitting in, feeling sexualized, and trying to figure out who to date. If this isn’t enough, we are straddling two or more racial worlds, which can sometimes be very confusing and frustrating but also incredible and amazing. (Douglas, 2012, p. 24)

A New Narrative?

Some have suggested that we have achieved a postracial society holding up the accomplishments of a few people of color and persons with multiple racial heritages, such as Colin Powell, Oprah Winfrey, Halle Berry, and especially President Obama.

But, as I wrote these words, I knew this not to be true. As Hobbs (2014) explained,

the friendly embrace of hybridity in the twenty-first century neither signals the achievement of a “postracial” age nor supports the colorblind thesis that race no longer matters Some scholars have argued that the chorus of support for a mixed-race movement corresponds with worrisome setbacks to civil rights legislation Race is reproduced all around us, at every level of society, including in our everyday lives. (p. 277)

The creation of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the ensuing controversies expressed in phrases such as All Lives Matter, and Blue Lives Matter, supports the view that we have not created a postracial society. The multiple killings of black men by police and the retaliatory shootings of police officers, and the racially charged rhetoric of President Trump, has brought racial conflicts out of the microaggression shadows. It is obvious that race is still quite salient in the United States.

I wonder, how might these events, and the racial tensions that surround them, impact the present and future experiences and the shaping of stories to live by of persons with multiple racial heritages? I imagine that, as Root (2003a) posits, the generation born between the late 1990s and the early 2000s “will experience being multiracial even differently than did the [previous] generations” (p. 111). But, I am reminded that the principle of continuity of experience (Dewey, 1938/1997) tells us that the past will continue to have an impact. Hobbs’s (2014) recognized this as she explained,

shards and fragments of past racial regimes remain visible in contemporary ones. Even in historical moments widely heralded as turning points, when the nation seems to pivot and reverse course, the past still can be seen in the present. This observation does not suggest that nothing is new, but rather that new arrangements are never wholly free of some elements of the old. Racial ideologies are plastic, and they are quick to adapt and reproduce under new social structures. The past is stubborn. Time never begins again. As our present moment unfolds, we are often left to wonder if we have seen this movie before. (p. 273).

At every moment in time, we, individually and collectively, stand in a present that holds the promise of a new future while simultaneously being influenced by the past. I imagine

that past, current, and future social contexts shape the experiences and stories to live by of persons with multiple racial heritages in ways that may be similar to and different from those who have gone before. I am reminded that even when similarities of experience exist from person to person, the experience itself is individual in its complexity and multiplicity. Coming to an understanding of the experiences and stories to live by of other human beings holds the potential of allowing us to wade in someone else's stream of life. Possibly, in this way, we can see others with loving eyes and travel to their "worlds" so that together we can co-compose new "worlds" that we can co-inhabit in just and peaceful ways.

Chapter 3: The Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined narrative inquiry as

a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

To fully understand this definition it is necessary to turn to Dewey's (1938/1997) theory of experience, the "foremost influence" upon Clandinin and Connelly's (2000, p. 1) thinking as they worked toward conceptualizing narrative inquiry as both methodology and phenomenon of study.

Dewey (1938/1997) put forth two principles of experience. The first, continuity, expresses the idea that experiences, though they may appear to be independent events occurring sequentially, actually proceed along a continuum one from another such "that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 35). This taking up and modifying are due to the interaction—Dewey's (1938/1997) second principle of experience—between the external objective conditions of the experience impacting and changing the internal subjective conditions of the person having the experience. In this "interaction" between the internal and external a new "situation" is formed (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 42). Each situation then creates new internal conditions,

thereby bestowing upon subsequent experiences what has gone before. The result being, the one undergoing these experiences is modified becoming a “somewhat different person” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 35) with the progression of each subsequent experience. It must also be recognized that the undergoing of and results of an experience is not confined to the individual. The principle of continuity means that an individual’s experience is also influenced by the previous experiences and actions of humankind (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 39).

Dewey (1938/1997) saw the interdependence of continuity and interaction as longitudinal and latitudinal dimensions of experience. Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) argued that Dewey’s view of experience, with continuity and interaction intercepting and uniting with each other (Dewey, 1938/1997), reflects “not a transcendental . . . [but a] transactional” (p. 39) ontology. In other words, our becoming is a relational, and interactive process, not one of abstractions outside of experience separate from the people and contexts around us. This is founded in “a conception of reality as relational, temporal, and continuous” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 599). Narrative inquirers express this conception of experience as the

personal and social (interaction); *past, present, and future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along a third. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

Placing Dewey’s (1938/1997) theory of experience and the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space next to the above definition of narrative inquiry, it is evident that

the researcher and participant must meet each other within the progression of their own and their interacting lives in a relationship through which they inquire into experience. Narrative inquirers not only recognize, they embrace, the reality that the participant and the researcher are “in the midst” (Clandinin, 2013) of living as the inquiry begins, precedes, and comes to a close. The lives of the participant and the researcher are nested within “the ongoingness of institutional, social, cultural, familial, and linguistic narratives . . . which are also in the midst” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 44). Seen in this way, the complexity of lives and the “always becoming” nature of experience are evident. Narrative inquirers acknowledge that within the principle of continuity of experience rests the reality that our lives are always in process—in flux—and therefore we cannot make generalizations about experiences or dissect and reduce them to categories. Narrative inquirers attempt to present the wholeness yet incompleteness of experience.

To enter into this multifaceted uncertainty the narrative inquirer must, as the definition tells us, engage in the inquiry through “the stories of experience that make up people’s lives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Narrative inquirers, recognizing that “people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 37), see story (or narrative) as the portal through which the researcher and participant travel to gain access to the complexities of experience. The narrative inquirer does not seek to understand the story telling (such as story structure or syntax) of participants. It is the understanding of experience that the narrative inquirer seeks, and it is through stories told by and with participants that the researcher and participants, in relationship, come to that understanding. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that

we study it [experience] narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. In effect, narrative thinking is part of the phenomenon of narrative. It might be said that narrative method is a part or aspect of narrative phenomena. Thus, we say, narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences. (p. 18)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also explained that it is in “living and telling, reliving and retelling” (p. 20) that the narrative inquirer and the participant, in collaboration, inquire into experience. Narrative inquirers

understand that people *live* out stories and *tell* stories of their living. Narrative inquirers come alongside participants . . . and begin to engage in narrative inquiry into our lived and told stories. We call this process . . . *retelling* stories. Because we see that we are changed as we retell our lived and told stories, we may begin to relive our stories. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34)

As discussed previously, stories of experience are told as they are remembered in that moment, and they are quite likely not factually accurate recollections of events as they transpired. In this I have thought about my own experiences of telling and retelling stories and acknowledge that each time I retell the same story it is just a bit different than the last. I choose different words, emphasize different aspects, tie elements together in different ways, and tie that story to other stories in ways that I have not done previously. I have come to understand that continuity of experience is not linear; it is iterative. It moves back and forth through time, and with each iteration my new story becomes my “truth”. It is, in that present moment, what is real to me about that past experience. It is within such a process that “we restory ourselves and perhaps begin to shift the

institutional, social, and cultural narratives in which we are embedded” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34). This is not a weakness of human memory, but the strength of our ability to restory ourselves and create new stories to live by. The retelling and reliving of experiences in this manner are possible because of the interactive and continuous nature of experience itself.

Beginning my doctoral program.

Upon entering my doctoral program, Dr. Hamilton, my advisor, asked me why I had decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. I spoke to her about my interest in relationship building and my belief that a deep knowledge of students—who they are and the lives they live—is essential for us to be effective educators. I explained that I had become quite disillusioned with the way we educate children—with the focus on standards, objectives, assessments, and measuring—and that I felt that we were failing to recognize the importance of knowing our students and building relationships with them. I explained that my experiences as a classroom teacher had taught me that relationship building and having knowledge of students are key to their academic and social success in schools and classrooms, and that I had come to believe that we (educators) need to be much better at this. In response, she advised me to begin reading about narrative inquiry through the writings of Jean Clandinin. With that recommendation I was set upon a trajectory that has led me to a new conceptualization of human experience and the discovery of narrative inquiry as phenomenon and methodology. More than five years have transpired since that conversation, and the many books and articles I have read since then have allowed me to be able to name my journey

before and during my doctoral work as a turn toward narrative (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

As I look back to my beginnings of this journey and come forward to the present, I now see more clearly my desire to understand students as whole human beings living lives that are so much more intricate and nuanced than what the conditions and structures of schools and classrooms allow us to easily see. I know that outside-of-school lives and inside-of-school lives mingle together even though our actions as teachers and administrators sometimes appear to indicate that we believe we can sever them from each other. Here I am reminded of the image of “interconnected, nested stories” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 22). It helps me visualize that no one story within a person’s life stands alone, and individual’s stories develop and grow within the stories of the people and institutions around them. It makes it abundantly clear that complexities abound within these interconnected and nested stories. It challenges me to think more intently about the depth and breadth of experience—the multiple dimensions and the multiple facets within those dimensions. In their interconnectedness, experiences are impacted by, changed by, and become part of each other. Distinguishing one from another with complete certainty is impossible. And, although we sometimes convince ourselves that we can see the entire picture, this is an illusion.

I do not want to give the impression that I jumped quickly and easily from that first day with Dr. Hamilton to my current state of thinking. In actuality, I have been involved in an iterative process—one that has pushed me forward and pulled me back. As I have found clarity, confusion has been just around the corner forcing me to revisit earlier thinking. I have stumbled over more than a few rocks in the stream, and have

found myself underwater gasping for air. Fortunately, I have experienced moments when I was able to regain my footing, lift my head and breath easier as a result of making connections between my desire for greater understanding of students through relationship building and what I am learning through my academic studies and within this inquiry.

A moment in time.

As I wrote the proposal for this study I returned to my experiences as a classroom teacher and school administrator, my thoughts regarding the importance of classroom relationships, and my initial conversation with Dr. Hamilton. I laid them next to my new understandings of the dimensionality of experience, and of story as a “portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, pp. 37-38). The result was an expanded understanding of classroom life as multiple and simultaneous situations of human experience that are impacted by each other through social and historical influences, an increased appreciation for “ordinary lived experience” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18) that transpires inside and outside of schools, and a reinforcement of my belief in the value of being knowledgeable about students’ life experiences for the purpose of building relationships and enhancing teachers’ educational decision-making and students’ educational life. I also came to the conclusion that even when I did not have these understandings and I lacked the vocabulary to express what I was looking for I was aspiring to become a narrative inquirer. Narrative inquiry, with its foundation in Dewey’s (1938/1997) theory of experience, resonated and continues to resonate with my personal orientation to life, teaching, and learning.

I also came to see that narrative inquiry is a methodology that provides the researcher and participant with an open and expansive view of experience. It does not set presupposed limits upon the research. It allows the researcher and participant to negotiate and renegotiate the process as the needs of those involved and the needs of the inquiry develop and reveal themselves. It does not seek to distill an experience down to a supposed essential or common element; rather, through the living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Huber et al., 2013) of stories, it seeks to understand the particularities of human experiences. Through this process we gain understanding of each other, ourselves, and of humanity.

This is accomplished through a purposeful attention—before, during, and after the inquiry—to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Attending to the personal and social, the past, present, and future, and place or series of places, the researcher and participant acknowledge that experience is not singular and cannot be isolated. In the case of this inquiry, this acknowledgement opened the view of the researcher and participant beyond an inquiry into “being multiracial,” as if that and that alone defines the participant’s experience. It took the inquiry into a space that recognizes that having multiple racial heritages is one aspect of the participant’s life experiences and to understand that aspect it must be seen within the wholeness of experience, the wholeness that the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space acknowledges and lived and told stories express.

I came to see that narrative inquiry is particularly well suited to add to the literature regarding racial identity development of individuals with multiple racial heritages since previous work in the field provides “evidence that supports a person-

environment or psychosocial process” (Renn, 2008, p. 17), meaning that the process is influenced by personal factors (such as phenotype and cultural knowledge) and social factors (such as family relationships, peer acceptance, and community environment).

Additionally, as Rockquemore et al. (2009) pointed out,

despite a consensus around the fact that racial identity may change over time for mixed-race people, the life course perspective (Elder, 1974, 1998) has not yet been fully incorporated into the empirical study of identity formation, development, and maintenance in the mixed-race population. Given the theoretical and methodological advances made over the past decade, this is an odd state of affairs because the life course perspective focuses explicitly on the patterning of lives as individuals make status transitions (e.g. from child to adolescent, adolescent to young adult, young adult to adult) while embedding such transitioning within the forces of history, social spaces, institutional arrangements, economic conditions, and racialized social structures. (p. 22)

I concluded that narrative inquiry, with the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, is a methodology that is capable of looking at the psychosocial processes within the life course of individuals with multiple racial heritages. I entered this inquiry with the hope that the study participants and I might add to our understanding of not only the racial identity development but also the complex and multiple identities—stories to live by—that individuals with multiple racial heritages live, tell, retell, and relive.

Coming into Relationship

Narrative inquiry, being grounded in Dewey’s (1938/1997) theory of experience, is relational. The researcher not only acknowledges the relationality of experience, but

also understands that to inquire into experience it is necessary to enter into relationship with participants. This means that I, as a narrative inquirer, had to “negotiate with participants an ongoing relational inquiry space” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 193). Although I brought my research puzzle and related wonderings to the inquiry, it was essential that I remained cognizant of and open to the possibility that participants would bring their own puzzles and wonderings to the inquiry.

Participants came to the inquiry “in the midst of their lives and their lives are shaped by attending to past, present, and unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 192). Being “in the midst” refers to the ongoing nature of life as well as the interactive and continuous nature of experience. Participants’ lives continue outside of the inquiry. Those lives permeate the inquiry and the inquiry infiltrates into those lives.

Likewise, the researcher does not simply drop into the lives of participants at isolated moments in time, gather information, and leave as if no trace of the researcher is left with the participant and no trace of the participant is left with the researcher. I came to the inquiry relationship in the mist of my life both personally and as a doctoral student in the Curriculum and Teaching Department within the University of Kansas. My life, too, permeated the inquiry and the inquiry infiltrated into my life. As participants and I met in relationship in the midst of our lives the unique combination of our past, present, and unfolding lives significantly influenced the inquiry itself. This gave rise to the need for continuing negotiations between participants and myself throughout the inquiry.

Clandinin and Caine (2013) explained,

entering the field begins with negotiation of relationships, and the research puzzles to be explored. Negotiations of purpose, transitions, intentions, and texts are ongoing processes throughout the inquiry. Narrative inquirers also negotiate ways they can be helpful to participant(s) both in, and following, the research. (p. 192)

While remaining open to possibilities that might reveal themselves as the inquiry unfolded, I entered the inquiry with my imaginings about participants and the structure and process of the inquiry.

Participants.

When I imagined the participants for this inquiry, I return to my research puzzle—possible connections between experiences and stories to live by of individuals with multiple racial heritages—and the accompanying wonderings regarding family, society, and school. Since I take the position that race is a socially constructed concept resulting in an ever changing understanding and a lack of consensus regarding the definition of the term, I came to the conclusion that it was most appropriate for me to invite persons to this inquiry who self-identify as having multiple racial heritages. I decided not to impose any definition of race upon potential participants even though there are official definitions set forth by institutions such as the U.S. Census Bureau. For example, persons of Middle Eastern descent are often categorized as white on government forms such as the U.S. Census (United States Census Bureau, 2013), however, experientially a person of Middle Eastern descent might identify as non-white. Similarly, persons of Hispanic heritage, considered an ethnicity and not a race, and classified as white because of their European/Spanish heritage by the U.S. Census

Bureau, might personally identify as non-white. This inquiry intended to understand the experiences of individuals as they live their complex, multiple, and changing stories to live by. Therefore, the individual's definition of race, not that of a governmental entity, was and is of import. Persons who see themselves as having multiple racial heritages—whatever that might mean to them—were potential inquiry participants.

I also imagined future participants as young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. I believed it essential that participants be adults able to provide their own consent for participation in this inquiry. As a person with multiple racial heritages, the sharing of their stories of experience and stories to live by holds the potential of recalling difficult situations and bringing forth uncomfortable emotions; I believe that the decision to enter into this possibility was most appropriately made by the participant and only the participant. Also, individuals within the 18 to 35 year range have come into adulthood during the time period when individuals with multiple racial heritages have become more visible in the public eye. On a theoretical level, they have entered adulthood as members of Root's (2003a) biracial boomer generation and during the development of the ecological theories of racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages (Rockquemore et al., 2009). These theoretical developments have given rise to a recognition of the complexity and multiplicity of the individual experience through the identification of multiple healthy identity outcomes and the psychosocial and life-course processes involved. It seemed likely, therefore, that individuals in my chosen age group would have experienced having multiple racial heritages differently than older adults. This is important to my inquiry because one of the purposes of this study is my desire to

potentially provide classroom teachers with insights into the experiences of their students who have multiple racial heritages.

While in the proposal stage of this inquiry, I imagined coming into relationship with three participants. At the time I judged that I would have the capacity to fully and deeply engage with three participants. I also believed that coming alongside three participants would bring the depth and breadth of experience that would allow for a meaningful and nuanced study through which to better understand the particular experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages. Also, since narrative inquiry as a methodology requires that the participant and researcher be able to communicate stories of experience I knew that it would be vital for language to not be a barrier. Due to the fact that I speak only English, it was essential that participants have at minimum conversational skills in English.

To identify individuals who I might invite into my study I told the story of this inquiry to both personal and organizational contacts. My personal contacts included several multiracial families as well as friends and family members who have relationships with persons with multiple racial heritages. In addition, I shared the story of my inquiry with friends and family through social media. I also contacted university and community organizations that serve multicultural and multiracial individuals. Although I communicated with potential participants via telephone, I primarily used e-mail with an attached flyer (see Appendix A) or with an announcement in the body of the email (see Appendix B).

I was able to obtain the membership list for an organization at Midwest University (MWU)¹⁰ that specifically serves multiracial and multicultural students. I sent a personal e-mail to everyone on the list; three members responded indicating interest. After further communication via e-mail, telephone, and in-person meetings, all three became participants in this study. At the beginning of the inquiry Maylynn (a pseudonym chosen by the participant) was a 19-year-old freshman at MWU who entered the university as a theater major. Maylynn's father is African-American and her mother is white. Nicole (a pseudonym chosen by the participant) was 22 years old. After completing her junior year at MWU she transferred to a small nursing college in a neighboring state. Nicole's father is white and her mother is Vietnamese. Breanna (who decided to use her real name) was a 22-year-old senior at MWU majoring in Global International Business and East Asian Studies with Korean Language Concentration. Breanna was born in Korea to Korean parents and adopted by white parents in the United States.

Living the narrative inquiry.

This narrative inquiry began with stories told during one-on-one research conversations. In the planning and recruitment phases, and as participants and I moved into the "field" it was necessary to think on a practical level to address aspects such as the duration of the study, the number, frequency, and length of time of the research conversations, and methodological strategies. I discussed these elements with participants before the study began so that they would be able to make informed decisions regarding their participation. At the outset of the inquiry all three participants agreed to meet with me for

¹⁰ Midwest University or MWU are pseudonyms that I use to refer to a large post-secondary institution in the mid-west region of the United States.

approximately eight to ten research conversations of approximately sixty minutes each over a span of six to eight months.

Obviously, the practicalities are important and necessary, but it is of utmost importance to remember that narrative inquiry is a relational methodology. The “field”, the “ongoing relational inquiry space” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 193) is an interpersonal space where two human beings come together to share stories of experience. Within this relational space it was crucial that I remained open to continual negotiations of the practicalities within that space. As the inquiry progressed I negotiated the time, location, and intervals between conversations with each participant to ensure that they took place in physically and emotionally comfortable settings. By the end of the inquiry I had met with each participant six or seven times over a seven-month period for the research conversations. Participants and I had either one or two additional discussions, either in person or via email conversations, for negotiating of the final research texts.

Negotiating entry into the field also included sharing my personal story and reasons for desiring to enter into this inquiry. This was an essential first step in building relationship with the participants; by inviting them into my stories I was hoping it would assist them with feeling comfortable to share their stories. To assist participants with telling and retelling their stories I asked them to share artifacts in the form of family photographs to serve as “a rich source of memories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). I also asked each of them to create a graphic or visual representation of significant events, happenings, and experiences. My thinking here came out of Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) description of an annal, “a list of dates of memories, events, stories,

and the like” (p. 112) and a chronicle, “sequence of events in and around a particular topic” (p. 112). I explained to participant that their graphic could be in the form of a timeline, but that it could take whatever form she found most expressive of her experiences. My invitation to create this visual representation was intended to allow each participant the freedom of expression that would grow out of her unique experiences and stories to live by. All three participants accepted my invitation to create what I know refer to as graphic annals.

Every research conversation was digitally recorded and then transcribed by a transcription service or myself. These transcripts, the graphic annals, and my own researcher reflections became the field texts for this inquiry. Staying within the spirit of co-composition, the moves from the field to the writing of interim texts and then to final research texts was an iterative process that was negotiated within the researcher-participant relationship. The appropriate time of when to move away from the field was, in some ways, something that I seemed to sense as a natural progression of the inquiry relationship. However, I did not want to be presumptuous by making that decision on my own. So, during what became the last or second to last conversation with each participant we discussed this decision within the context of a conversation in which I asked if they had any additional wonders, puzzles, or stories of experience they wanted to share.

I then moved into the process of composing interim research texts, known as interim narrative accounts within narrative inquiry. A narrative account is a retelling of not only a participant’s stories of experiences, but also a retelling of stories of the inquiry within the participant and researcher relationship. The researcher does not stand outside looking in upon the experience of participants; the researcher comes into and is part of

the experience of living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Huber et al., 2013) of experiences. This “first level of analysis” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132) involved listening and re-listening to conversation recordings, reading and re-reading conversation transcripts, revisiting my researcher journals, and reflecting upon my conversations with each participant about their graphic annals.

Staying mindful of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and the puzzles and wonders that brought me to this inquiry, the graphic annals became visual metaphorical representation of the lives of each participant. They became unique collections of guideposts that turned my attention to narrative threads, or “particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132) in the stories of their experiences. Genoway, Caine, Singh, and Estefan (2016), explain, “narrative threads are a way of looking at experiences as a whole while not fragmenting experiences into themes (Riesman, 2007). These threads are composed around plots or subplots in the stories that make up experience” (p. 435). At the same time, laying their stories of experiences next to their graphic annals, I was reminded of the need to look for the stories that “live at the edges” (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 392) of other stories in order to see the wholeness of the lives of each participant. In other words, narrative threads weave through, across, and around the edges of each other. Additionally, it was important that I was attentive to moments of tension within the stories of experience that participants shared with me. Clandinin et al., (2010) found that tensions helped them “identify, inquire into, and represent the narrative threads that lived within individuals’ storied lives. Tensions also helped [them] identify, inquire into, and represent relational tensions between individuals’ storied lives and their expressions” (p. 83).

I then began moving portions of the field texts together around what I had tentatively identified as narrative threads. I also created word images which are “brief but evocative ways to represent the lives” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 216) of participants, and on the page they took on the appearance of poetry. Huber and Clandinin (2005) explain, “by weaving together fragments of stories emerging across our field notes, we created a set of images of each of their [the participants’] lives” (p. 320). The reorganized field texts, the word images, and the graphic annals were used to guide the process of writing of interim research texts or “tentative narrative account” (Clandinin, 2013, p.114) of each of the participants’ experiences and stories to live by.

As I wrote I often returned to the beginning of the narrative account reading it again and again, laboring to retell the participants’ stories of experience and the stories of the inquiry. On multiple occasions I turned to my response community to assist me with gaining deeper insights into the experiences of participants and to recognize my own influence on the inquiry, the research puzzles, and the experiences lived, told, retold, and relived by participants (Clandinin, 2013). As I explained in the preface, I felt a great responsibility to represent the voices that have contributed to this inquiry. Obviously, of great importance are the voice of the participants, but I felt it ethically necessary to reveal my own voice and the voices from various literary sources. To accomplish this, narrative accounts for each participant often include story fragments from research conversations and word images, and I made use of the space on the page to represent the movement between the personal and social dimensions of experience (Dewey, 1938/1997). I presented *others’ stories of experience and others’ voices in conversations in boldface italics* and *my stories of experience and my voice in conversations is in plain italics*.

Tentative narrative accounts were then shared with Dr. Clandinin, my methodology advisor, for her feedback and guidance. This deepened and expanded my thinking and led to revisions. Also, because of the relational nature of narrative inquiry, it was crucial that I include the participants in this process, because, as Clandinin (2013) explained,

moving from field texts to interim and final research texts is a complicated and iterative process, full of twists and turns. There is no linear unfolding of data gathering to data analysis to publishing research findings. Narrative inquirers continue to live in relational ways with participants, although in less intense ways, throughout the process of moving from field texts to research texts. Field, interim, and final research texts are co-composed or negotiated with participants. (p. 49).

I shared the tentative narrative accounts with each respective participant, sometimes with wonderings that had come to my mind during the writing process, and together we negotiated the content of the final narrative account.

I then moved into the process of “look[ing] across the narrative accounts to inquire into resonant threads or patterns” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132). In this “second level of analysis” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132), I “searched for...echoes that reverberated across accounts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132). To begin this process I returned to my researcher journals where I had made note of resonances that were emerging in my thinking while I was in the field and writing narrative accounts. I then “laid the accounts metaphorically alongside one another” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132), by returning to each narrative account while holding the other narrative accounts in my mind, and looked for plotlines that wove through all three narrative accounts.

Ethical considerations.

Relational ethics.

The ethical responsibilities that are outlined by the Institutional Review Board process are important and valuable steps necessary for protecting human persons who participate in research studies, and I will address the steps I took to comply with these policies in a later section of this proposal. However, the Institutional Review Board process implies that once consent forms are completed and signed at the beginning of a study we only need to revisit ethical considerations when a study is significantly modified or when a specific time period elapses. Narrative inquiry calls upon researchers to take a different approach to research ethics. As narrative inquirers we ask to enter into the lives and experiences of participants. We ask that they trust us with intimate and private stories. We ask that they allow us to share those stories with other people. These stories are who they are. In order to come to a point where participants find us trustworthy enough to be allowed into their stories, we must come into relationship with them. Relationship requires intimacy, caring, respect, kindness, support, and reciprocity, and calls for an ethic that goes beyond specified forms, processes, and approvals. The relational nature of narrative inquiry requires that we abide by relational ethics, which I see as an “ethic of care” in which “our motivation in caring is directed toward the welfare, protection, or enhancement of the cared-for” (Noddings, 1984, p.23). In my view, this is the overarching ethic of a narrative inquiry.

As I looked toward entering into relationship with participants who have multiple racial heritages a great concern of mine was how potential participants might perceive me as a white person with a single racial heritage. There is a history of white saviorism in our

society, an image that has been proliferated through both the news and entertainment media (Brown, 2013), and communicates a supposed need for white persons to come to the rescue of persons of color. “The savior mentality is built on a deficit discourse” (Brown, 2013, p. 125) regarding people of color. The “savior” presents himself or herself as someone who has overcome their own prejudices and is there to “help” the person of color. This may, at first blush, appear to be in the spirit of an ethic of care, but it fails in its conception of the nature of a caring relationship. “Caring involves, for the one-caring, a ‘feeling with’ the other” (Noddings, 1984, p. 30), not a feeling of superior separateness, as is implied by someone coming to “help”.

To approach the inquiry with an ethic of care, I attempted to come into relationship with participants as an ally. Brown and Ostrove (2013) define allies in the following way:

Allies can be distinguished from individuals who are motivated simply to express minimal or no prejudice toward nondominant people. Allies are people willing to take action, either interpersonally or in larger social settings, and move beyond self-regulation of prejudice. In this way, two characteristics appear to separate allies from low-prejudice individuals, namely, allies’ desire to promote social justice actively and their willingness to offer support to nondominant people. (p. 2212).

I have always seen this inquiry itself as an avenue to promote social justice for persons with multiple racial heritages, and, as such, an expression of my desire to be ally. I shared this desire with the participants during the recruitment phase and throughout the inquiry. By positioning myself as an ally, I strove to communicate that I see them as knowers—as

persons with meaningful experiences and valuable knowledge. It was my hope that this would reduce the likelihood that participants might see me, in the position of researcher, as the more knowledgeable person in the research relationship. My goal was to forge relationships in which participants and I could see each other as partners bringing different sets of knowledge to the relational inquiry space.

To check this aspect of researcher-participant relationship I turned to Maylynn after several research conversations. She and I were speaking about the role of an ally, so I asked her how she perceived me. I told her that while imagining this inquiry I had been concerned that potential participants might view me suspiciously since I do not share the experience of having multiracial heritages or being a person of color. She told me, that in her eyes, the stories I told at the beginning of the inquiry about my relationship with my grandson, and my concerns for him in future educational and social contexts, helped her to see me as an ally. It was not my direct experiences, but my concern for his experiences that created that space in our relationship.

To ethically care for participants it was also necessary that I be attentive to the complexities of their stories of experience and their stories to live by. Prior to entering into the inquiry I was aware that tensions might arise, and those tensions might bring emotional responses that participants would find uncomfortable and possibly painful, yet a narrative inquirer must resist the temptation to make stories smooth (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Relational ethics required that I discuss this possibility during the participant recruitment process. And, when tensions did arise, such as when Maylynn and Breanna retold stories about their struggles with mental health issues, when Breanna retold stories about her strained relationship with her mother, and when Nicole retold

stories about being the object of stereotypical thought, relational ethics required that I listen to those story with patience, respect, and care. It also required that I leave open a space for each of them to retell the complexities of those stories and share their emotions surrounding those stories.

I also considered the open and honest sharing of my narrative beginnings—my stories as related to this inquiry—with participants an essential element of relational responsibility. The inquiry took place within conversations during which we shared our stories of experience with each other. Together we explored the research puzzle and co-composed the inquiry; this approach rose out of the relational and reciprocal nature of narrative inquiry. It was essential that the researcher-participant relationships develop into ones of mutual sharing and trust. The creation of such a space was a prerequisite for the participants to trust me enough to go beyond surface stories and cover stories and into their sacred stories.

This was not simple, quick, or easy. While all three participants were quite open with the sharing of many of their stories, there were times when it was obvious, particularly with Breanna, that she was hesitant to share certain stories about her relationship with her mother and her mental health status. And, as with the development of all human relationships, it simply takes time and effort. I was careful to give the relationships time to develop and unfold. I did not want to rush in, force the relationships, or take a “get-in and get-out” attitude toward the participants or the inquiry. I made efforts to travel to their “worlds” (Lugones, 1987) by approaching them humbly and with loving perception. This is necessary for the living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Huber et al., 2013) of stories within a narrative inquiry from the first moment of negotiating

entry into the field through every stage of the inquiry process. And, with each participant, she and I negotiated the time and place of each meeting, how often we met and for what duration, and when it was time for me to leave the field and enter into the writing of the tentative and final research texts. I was also attentive to the need to open a space in the inquiry for each participant to share her own wonderings and puzzles for us to explore.

Institutional Review Board requirements.

While narrative inquiry involves ethical aspects that arise from the relational nature of the methodology, which come into play before, during, and after the study, It was also necessary that I comply with the policies set forth by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Kansas. These policies have been put in place to protect the interests of participants and must be addressed before entering into research relationships. Prior to entering into participant recruitment I submitted my study plan to the review board and received approval.

Informed consent.

Ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board require participants to be fully aware of the purpose of the study, the commitment they were making, and the potential benefits and risks associated with this study before they gave their consent to participate in this research. All recruitment materials, such as the flier found in Appendix A and the email found in Appendix B, included this information. During my initial meetings with participants I reiterated and restated this information as needed, and answered participant questions fully and honestly. Participants were required to sign an Informed Consent Statement prior to entering the study.

Anonymity.

To protect the identity of participants, each was asked to choose a pseudonym for use throughout the study, in all interim and final research texts, and in any future publications. However, Breanna elected to not choose a pseudonym and her written consent was obtained. In addition, fictitious names were used in place of names of identifiable locations (such as states, cities, schools) and organizations. Every effort was made in the writing of this dissertation to significantly reduce the likelihood that a reader might ascertain the identity of Maylynn and Nicole.

Data Security.

Research conversations were digitally recorded on a password protected digital recording device then transferred to and stored on Google drive via a password-protected laptop, and backed-up on a password protected and encrypted external hard drive. During research conversations, participants were afforded the option of discontinuing or asking for the recording to be discontinued if desired. The recordings were transcribed by the researcher or by a transcription company hired by the researcher. Recordings were encrypted before being sent to a transcription company. The recording device, laptop, hard drive, printed copies of transcripts were stored in a secured locked cabinet when not in use by the researcher. Recordings will be deleted from all devices after the dissertation has been submitted and defended. The graphic annals, when in the possession of the researcher, were secured in a locked cabinet and identified by the participants' chosen pseudonyms if applicable. The originals of the graphic annals will be returned to the participants after the dissertation has been submitted and defended if so desired by the participant. Otherwise, they will be destroyed.

Justifications For This Study

The following words of Clandinin and Caine (2013) guided my thinking as I have and continue to consider the reasons for this inquiry.

As we begin to imagine and design narrative inquiries, it is important to hold in mind the need narrative inquirers share with all social science researchers, that is, the need to be able to justify the research through responding to questions of “so what?” and “who cares?” As narrative inquirers we need to be able to justify narrative inquiries in three ways: personally, practically, and socially. (p. 196)

Personal justifications.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) tell us “narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines” (p. 121). This is why we begin our inquiries with the writing of our own narrative beginnings. Through this writing we are able to clarify “what our inquiry interests are and how to justify them in personal terms” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 122). As I have shared, my personal justifications spring from my love, care, and concern for my grandson and my wonderings about his future life experiences and identity making process.

Since his birth and my participation in the *Multicultural Education* course, I, like Lund (2010), “have been on a journey to discover how I perpetuate racism” (p. 15). I have and continue to work to eliminate racist thoughts and behavior from my life. As Kendal (2002) pointed out, “for some eliminating racism is life and death, a question of survival, being seen as opposed to being invisible. For others, [it] is an interesting intellectual exercise from which we can be basically removed”. The recognition that “as

white people, we have the privilege and ability to discount the worth of an individual of color, his or her comments and behavior, and to alter his or her future, based on our assessments” (Kendall, 2002), has been instrumental in my recognition of the reality of the struggle for survival that confronts people of color. My fear of this ability of white people to have power over my grandson’s life and the unjustness of that reality has been instrumental in moving the illumination of racism from an intellectual issue to an issue of survival; not my own survival, but the survival of people that I love—my grandson, my daughter, and my son-in-law.

Practical justifications.

For teachers to create educative experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997) for their students it is essential that they become “intelligently aware of the capacities, needs, and past experiences of those under instruction” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 71). Teachers must know and understand their students’ lives both inside and outside of school in order to make instructional, curricular, and classroom environment decisions that meet the needs of their particular students. To accomplish this teachers must come to understand that the experiences and stories to live by of their students with multiple racial heritages have different facets, nuances, and complexities than those of their monoracial students. With this study, I hope to enhance teachers’ understanding of this reality and contribute, even if in a small way, to their ability to come to know, build relationships with, and better teach their students with multiple racial heritages.

Social justifications.

Clandinin and Caine (2013) explain that “we can think of social justification in two ways: theoretical justification as well as social action and policy justifications” (p.

196). As I imagined this inquiry, I saw the potential for this study to contribute to the theory around identity development of individuals with multiple racial heritages. As I have discussed previously, various theories have been put forth in relation to identity and identity development of persons of multiple racial heritages. These theories have changed as social and cultural conditions have changed. Rockquemore et al. (2009) argue that rather than continue to develop new theories it would be wise to focus our efforts on empirical research to evaluate the theories that have been posited. However, Root (2003a) believes that within the contexts of current social conditions persons with multiple racial heritages “will experience being multiracial even differently than did the [previous] generations” (p. 111). I saw this study as holding the potential to shed light on the positions of both of these theorists.

I also saw social justice and equity issues at play in this inquiry. It was my intention to provide a space in which the voices of individuals with multiple racial heritages can be heard. Every human being has the right to be heard, especially in the teacher-student relationship. By opening this space in my research, I hope that teachers will likewise open a space to hear the voices of students with multiple racial heritages within their classrooms, which has the potential to lead to more appropriate and equitable educational experiences for these students. In this I hope to interrupt the silence.

Chapter 4: Maylynn

Coming into Relationship with Maylynn

Maylynn responded to my recruitment email (see Appendix B) by simply stating, “I am very interested in contributing to your research! How can I join?” I was amazed that she would want to commit to participate in this study based solely on the limited information available to her. I knew I needed to provide her with greater detail and answer any questions she might have before she could give informed consent. To that end we set up a time to talk on the phone; I explained the structure of the study and why I was interested in this research. During the conversation, just as with her email response, she was quite enthusiastic about participating. We arranged to meet about a week later in the courtyard area of a classroom building on her university campus.

Before that meeting I asked Maylynn how I would recognize her. She told me that she would be wearing a denim dress and that she has a lot of hair. When she entered the courtyard I immediately recognized her. The curls of her long brown hair billowed around her face and shoulders; they create an expansive silhouette that I now see as a physical expression of a story to live by that says—Here I am; this is me. We found a bench inside the classroom building and began to talk. I asked her if she had any questions about the study in addition to what we had discussed during our phone conversation. She told me that she thought she understood the direction and purpose of the study, so we discussed and she signed the consent form. We immediately began our first research conversation.

I sensed an openness and honesty from Maylynn as she began talking. As I reflected upon the experience of meeting Maylynn the word that instantly entered my

thoughts was “lovely”, and while she does have a lovely physical appearance, my thoughts were not around her physical beauty. It was her lovely spirit that I found totally captivating as she spoke about her family and her love for her grandmother. I don’t mean to imply that she sees the world through rose-colored glasses¹¹. In fact, she is quite aware of her own flaws, the flaws of those she loves, and the flaws of the world in which she lives. Her loveliness, in my estimation, emanates from her desire to make the world a better place. I came to understand this more and more as our relationship progressed through the telling of stories of experience that reflected her wisdom, intellectual strength, curiosity, and a social consciousness that is driven by a thirst for justice and a desire to be a force for creating a more socially just society.

Stories of Family and Stories of Self

To begin our first conversation I asked Maylynn to start by telling me about herself. I simply asked, “just tell me about you. Who are you?” She responded,

I am a theater major. I’ve always loved performing. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2015)

But this story, a story she later names as that of being and becoming a representational artist, a story to live by that is central to her imagined future, quickly shifted to stories that reach backward four generations on her mother’s side and three generations on her father’s side. At one point in her telling of these stories she paused to comment,

This family tree just keeps going. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

¹¹ Seeing through rose-colored glasses is an idiom that expresses the idea that the person sees the world as always and only positive and pleasant.

In this she put words to my own feelings as I attempted to mentally visualize the branches of her family tree, a task I later put to paper in order to aid my efforts to follow her stories of family from generation to generation and connect people to people.

Her stories of family are a co-mingling of stories she composed through her own lived experiences and stories that have been passed from generation to generation and told to her by her parents and grandparents.

They [stories] would be told by my mother, father, and Yaya (her paternal grandmother). Most of them probably through my mother . . . Yaya would tell me stories all the time, we'd be sitting in the living room or she'd make me breakfast before going to school. As for my mother, when we're in the kitchen at the same time we do a lot of talking. When I'm with my father, sometimes he tells me stuff when we're driving together. (Maylynn, research conversation, September 15, 2017)

As Dewey (1938/1997) tells us there is an “inescapable linkage of the present with the past [which is] a principle whose application is not restricted to the study of history” (p. 79). As Maylynn reached backward to tell me stories from the past, stories that included expressions of love in the midst of struggles, the linkage to her present experiences revealed themselves as she introduced me to three important people in her life—her mother, her father, and her paternal grandmother—and other members of her family tree.

My mother . . . she's white. My father . . . he is black and some other things. His mother . . . who I call Yaya . . . my grandmother, I just love her so much. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2015)

While Maylynn was in elementary school both of her parents worked, so after school she would alternate between her white grandmother and black grandmother. When Maylynn was ten years old her Meemaw, her white grandmother, decided to enroll her in a musical theater program which she loved. The telling of this story quickly moved Maylynn to stories that have been told to her by family members. Several of those stories

focused on the life of her paternal grandmother who was a child of rape born to a teenage mother in Texas in the mid-1930s. Yaya's physical health and emotional needs suffered while being raised by several neglectful family members.

She really started regularly going to school when she was eleven. She didn't have a toothbrush until she was eleven either. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

In her late teen years Yaya lived with “a very old aunt who was cruel to her, just awful”, requiring her to “throw out the chamber pots” and forbidding her from attending her prom (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017). To escape this treatment, Yaya joined the army when she was 18 years old, where she met her husband, Maylynn's grandfather. He was in the Marines and was,

a terrible alcoholic and just an awful person all around. . . . Not that being an alcoholic makes you a bad person, but he was also abusive. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

Perhaps this story of her grandfather's unfaithfulness in his marriage to her Yaya was also a contributing factor to her storying her grandfather as an awful person even though she never personally met him—he died before Maylynn was born.

Yaya caught him sleeping with a white woman and they divorced, and he married the white woman and gave birth to my half uncle I think my father was in late high school when [he] was born. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

At the time, Yaya, her husband, and their son—Maylynn's father—were living overseas having been stationed there by the United States military. Upon separating from her husband, Yaya moved herself and her son to a city in the southeastern region of the United States. The dissolution of her marriage created financial challenges that resulted in the need to rent a single room with a single bed in another family's home. After high school Maylynn's father went to college in that southeastern city, but having attending

small schools on military bases he was unprepared for the environment of a large university and was not successful. Like his mother he elected to join the army.

Maylynn's mother left home when she was seventeen and spent some time living with an artist community. Eventually she was living in the same southeastern city as Maylynn's father. After meeting at a party, getting married, and having Maylynn, they relocated to a rural area just outside of the town where Midwestern State University (MWSU) is located. Just as Maylynn was entering her teen years her parents divorced, but she explained,

They're still really good friends. They live near each other", and "Yaya also lives close by. We're like a triangle. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

Shifting to her mother's side of the family tree, Maylynn began to retell stories told to her by her mother and maternal grandmother, her Meemaw, about Meemaw's life. Although under quite different circumstances, like Yaya she also lived with struggle and disappointment. At the urging of her parents, she gave up her dream of becoming an opera singer for a more economically stable profession.

She loved doing musicals when she was doing opera, but her parents were like you probably shouldn't do that. So she went into nursing instead, and she hated it, but she did it. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

Maylynn's maternal great grandfather held a fairly high administrative position at Midwest State University. I wonder what stories of family, women, education, society, and the theater led him and his wife to dissuade their daughter from her dream. The loss of her dream, combined with her mother's critical nature, and being raped in college lead Maylynn's grandmother to be "majorly unhappy her entire life" (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016). Within Maylynn's own relationship with her

grandmother she has come to see her as a person struggling with “sort of a self-esteem thing” something Maylynn also sees in her mother (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016).

So, her self-esteem . . . the thing I’ve noticed, and apparently this has been her entire life . . . this self-depreciating stuff. If anyone complains, she takes it on herself. Oh, I’m sorry the weather’s bad, I should have picked a better day to come outside. And, so, my mother is also kind of like that in a way. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

As with her maternal grandmother, Maylynn’s mother and father have both faced difficulties in their efforts to live as artists.

My mother, she’s an artist. She started with painting. She did a lot of printmaking. She met my dad, she came back and she went to college a couple years after I was born, and she realized she wanted to do sculpture instead. So, she’s been doing iron sculpture ever since, which is really cool. Since her illness she’s not really been self-confident enough to market herself, but most recently she entered her stuff in a gallery. She had an entire section for her stuff. It was great! (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

My father, he fixes fire alarms, but he really likes playing guitar. He wants to be a musician. He picked up guitar soon after I was born, and he plays at bars and stuff, with his friends. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

Maylynn’s stories of family allude to physical and emotional hardship as well as concerns about financial security. Both of Maylynn’s parents live with mental health challenges; her father has “major depression” and her mother “suffers from anorexia” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017). And, although Maylynn herself is confronted with the challenges of anxiety and lack of financial resources, she is determined to not let this interrupt her imagined future of being and becoming a representational artist. I wonder if the stories being lived and told by her parents as they confront their challenges and work toward their artistic dreams have contributed to Maylynn’s ability to compose an imagined future that includes her dream to be a

representational artist—a story in contrast to the story of her Meemaw’s lost dream of being an opera singer.

As this first research conversation progressed and during subsequent conversations, Maylynn shifted to stories that link her experiences to the experiences of family members. One of those stories includes narratives about skin tone, hair texture, and racial identity. In this story she names herself as racially ambiguous—in an in-between space—a space in which she is “by myself” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016). Racial ambiguity, including having light skin, can give her advantages in society, and provide a space for moving freely between communities. It can also be the mark of an outsider, or at least not completely an insider, placing her in a position of not fully fitting in with the black community or the white community.

*Where do I go?
Which do I belong with?
I’m by myself.*

*It kind of feels like not really belonging
to one community or another*

(Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017)

Maylynn’s Yaya, I imagine, being “sort of light skinned” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016), but “barely passing the paper bag test¹²” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017) likely also experienced this in-betweenness, learning that her skin color and her “good hair”¹³ brought both privileges and

¹² “After slavery light skin and straight hair became a social resource in both Black and White communities....among the light-skinned [black] elite were ‘blue vein societies,’ which excluded Blacks whose blue veins were not visible beneath their skin; ‘paper bag tests,’ which allotted entrance into Black churches and other organizations based on comparison of one’s skin color to a light brown paper bag; and ‘comb tests,’ where acceptance was reserved for Black men and women with naturally straight hair able to withstand a fine-toothed comb” (Robinson, 2011, p. 362).

¹³ For black women, hair that is wavy or straight, preferably long is considered to be good hair. Conversely, hair that is kinky, tightly coiled, thick, and possibly short is considered bad hair (Robinson, 2011).

disadvantages that are “rooted in slavery and White supremacy” (Robinson, 2011, p. 361).

Being sort of light skinned, she also has ginger hair. She has I guess what some people would call good hair . . . not kinky or coil-y, just soft spirals, and mine is more kinky I guess. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

I wonder if having such experiences might be what led her Yaya to decide that Maylynn should, at the age of eight, have her hair straightened. Hair, Maylynn explained, has “kind of been a hot subject with my black grandmother” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016).

Growing up my mom, of course, didn’t know what to do with it. So, every Saturday I would go to my Yaya’s and she’d wash my hair in the kitchen sink and condition it and what not, and braid it in nice pigtails. When I was eight though she decided it would be a good time for me to get my hair permed straight, get it relaxed . . . and it was like hay for four years. It was stick straight. It was shoulder length. It was so bad . . . She’d still wash it once a week, but then she’d take a hot comb or a flat iron and she’d, you know, make it straight. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2017)

As Maylynn shared this story I wondered aloud

Why do you think she wanted you to do that?

Well the way she described it to me later is . . . that straight hair made me look like a white girl. You know, I went to a rural school for first through seventh grade, it was just me and this one other person, the two black people in the entire grade, and we’re both mixed, so, one full black person. Um, and, she was like, well, if we make her look a little less black looking then she might get treated better, not only by her classmates, but she might, I don’t know, get more help from her teachers if she looks less nappy. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

As I reflected upon this story, a story told on the same day that Maylynn identified herself as someone who has “a lot of hair”, I felt an emotional and embodied tension around the practice of judging others, and ourselves, based on physical characteristics. It might seem that descriptions involving height, weight, skin color, hair

texture, hair length, eye color, and so forth, are simple statements of fact. However, interpretations of these descriptions take place as they are filtered through stories told by society about what is valuable, what is beautiful, what is acceptable, and what makes a person worthy. This can put a person in a position of having to choose between living out an authentic expression that honors and values natural characteristics versus taking on an appearance that is more advantageous in certain social circles. As Robinson (2011) points out, “white-dominated culture has racialized beauty so that hair that reflects European ancestry is more attractive than hair that reflects African ancestry” (p. 360), but “ironically, although nappy or kinky hair texture is the most devalued, it is also the most versatile” (pp. 363-364) holding greater potential for styling.

My Yaya was always like your hair looks so nasty; it looks like rats been sucking on it. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

Compounding the tensions that I imagine arose in Maylynn from the dominant narrative that straightening her hair would make her more attractive, is the narrative that storied a young light-skinned black girl as less worthy of attention from her teachers when her hair was naturally kinky than when it was artificially straightened.

Later, as I reflected upon this conversation with an awareness that Maylynn identifies with rats and struggles with anxiety and self-esteem, I was troubled, actually angered, at the social conditions that moved her grandmother to such a decision.

I sort of identify with them. I love rats. Everyone thinks they're kind of nasty, but actually they're clean as cats . . . I just feel nasty a lot, but I'm not. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017)

I imagine that her grandmother made this decision because she thought it best for Maylynn. I wonder if her experiences taught her that even though Maylynn is light-skinned her kinky hair racially marked (MacLin & Malpass, 2001) her as black. Her

grandmother may have sensed that this put Maylynn at a disadvantage, perhaps in danger, in a predominantly white school. Even if well intentioned, Yaya's actions may have told Maylynn a story of needing to change herself in a fundamental way in order to be treated with respect and care by others, especially by those who occupy positions of power and privilege.

However, Maylynn is composing a counterstory, “a story that resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect” (Lindemann Nelson 2001, p.6), attempting “to shift the taken-for-granted institutional narratives” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 171).

Eventually my hair was just so damaged that my mother insisted that we go natural again . . . I haven't ironed it since . . . My dad, most people like it, it's just she [Yaya] kind of thinks it looks kind of, I don't know, a mess, unkempt. She's like mmmm, one day you'll be a lady and you'll care about your hair. Um, one day you'll try. That day hasn't come. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

This story, supported by many people in her life, pushes against the dominant story of physical beauty based on racial biases. As Maddox (2004) explains,

at its core, racial bias stems from the idea that White Eurocentric phenotypic characteristics (e.g. lighter skin and eye color, longer and straighter hair, narrower nose, and thinner lips) are preferable to features toward the other end of the continuum (e.g. darker skin color, kinkier hair, broader nose, fuller lips). As a consequence, White and non-White members of many societies are exposed to this ideal and adhere to it in their evaluations of themselves and others under many circumstances. (p. 383)

By wearing her hair in a natural style, Maylynn is rejecting those biases even though her Yaya, who she loves deeply, and much of society continues to tell those stories.

Although Maylynn feels supported by her mother's appreciation for her natural hair and physical beauty, she also feels a sense of discomfort stemming from the fact that her mother "specifically wanted a mixed baby" which Maylynn sees as "not a great reason to have child" (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017). Living in a space where "usually my mother's great" but simultaneously feeling fetishized by her because "apparently I'm more racially interesting because I am not 100 percent one or the other" is a source of tension for Maylynn. Bumping against her mother's focus on her mixed racial heritages are her father's affirmations that communicate to her that "even though I am light, I still have black features and I still have black heritage" and Yaya's message of "you're more white" (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017).

***My father kind of validated my blackness
My Yaya did not
My mother . . . wanted a mixed baby
(Interim research texts, June 15, 2017)***

These conversations took me back to the work of theorists such as Maria Root and the various racial identity models for individuals with multiple racial heritages: the problem approach, the equivalent approach, the variant approach, and the ecological approach (Rockquemore et al., 2009). I began to wonder about Maylynn's racial identity development experiences; this wondering came forth during one of our later research conversations.

I'm wondering, as you have progressed through life, childhood, middle school, high school, up to now, how have you viewed . . . your racial identity?

It's changed. When I was four, five, or six, my mother, father and I moved houses. The house we were going to move into needed to be renovated, so we lived with my Yaya for a while. I think that's the first time I really knew I'm both.

Why did you come to that conclusion?

Because I did constantly interact with both my father and Yaya, which is something that before that it would be just mostly my father I guess, to have more black people in my circle, that was, that kind of validated.

(Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2016)

As she moved through her elementary school years—from first through seventh grades—in a school situated in a rural, politically conservative, predominantly white context, her stories around racial identity were multiple, complex and shifting.

I still saw myself as other, but more like the black . . . but also for a time . . . I was feeling more white . . . also sort of just felt like an unidentified race, like something else. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

She connects these shifting stories to live by with the social interactions that were common in that environment including frequently hearing racist jokes and having her racial heritage diminished, or possibly appropriated, by others.

When I talked about my racial identity, one of the most annoying things another white student can say is, “I’m darker than you are.” Like, great, thank you. That means you must be partially black and not me. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Upon reflection I was reminded of her stories around the shifting social conditions in her home and school places, her struggles to feel a sense of belonging, and the impact these conditions had on her identity development. One of those shifting social conditions occurred just before she entered the eighth grade. Her family moved to a nearby college town where Midwest State University is located. Although still predominantly white, Maylynn found her school and the surrounding community to be more open and accepting of her. She explained,

I mean there were people like me. Of course it’s still majority white . . . but there were children from all over because there were professors’ kids. I thought that was really cool and I got to talk to all new people. These were teachers that seemed to be more understanding, and when I asked for help I got it, and it was,

I don't know, just a lot more of an accepting atmosphere. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

We returned to this story during a later conversation.

So, I'm hearing you say that when you were really young, elementary school age, that the context you were living in, that conservative context, taught you to . . . shield yourself, because that context was not accepting of who you knew yourself to be. So you shielded, and denied it, because to not deny would be dangerous?

Yes.

I don't know if that danger would be emotional danger or physical danger . . .

Yes, emotional.

So, then moving into middle school, where you have said it was . . . you so much more enjoyed the environment . . . how did that context shape who you were, who you saw yourself to be?

I was better allowed to express myself. I was . . . I could find my identity easier. Yeah, like who I am as a person. That became clearer as I was allowed to speak without fear of persecution.

(Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

In this and other less conservative contexts she felt that she was able to play with her racial identity. She was, for a time, attracted to the emo subculture¹⁴, what she characterized as “goth, but more indie . . . also very white centric” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017), but as she entered high school she identified as multiracial. When it came time for her to transition into college life, Maylynn chose to attend Midwestern University, rather than Midwestern State University, because MWU and its surrounding community are often storied as diverse and politically liberal

¹⁴ “The emo subculture sprouted from fans of emotional hardcore, or emocore, a style of punk rock in the 1980s. Emocore music is known for its loud, confessional, expressive, and emotional characteristics. It's generally associated with youth who are dispirited and angry with society, other people, or themselves. The emo subculture is widely followed by youth who identify with emocore music--they may not feel like they fit in, have negative emotions, and dress in dark, eccentric apparel” (Gonzalez, 2017).

environments. In this context, where she felt a validating openness and acceptance, she was able to proclaim,

I really do feel more black than white. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

As she pulled these stories forward Maylynn recognized the fluidity of her racial identity as she moves from place to place and in response to those who inhabit those places. Her racial identity is a story to live by that she composes and recomposes as she moves through life.

It's a dual identity, and it just flows back and forth. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Consistent with the ecological models (Rockquemore et al., 2009) of racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages, Maylynn's shifting stories to live by around race follow no predictable progression toward a supposed final, healthy racial identity outcome. Her stories to live by around race shift as her social contexts and her personal interactions shift. This reminded me of Lugones's (1987) notion of "world" –traveling, a "shifting from the mainstream construction of life where [one] is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where [one] is more or less 'at home'" (p. 3). As Maylynn travels between "worlds" (e.g. worlds of school and worlds of family) she plays with different racial identities as she attempts to find a space in each world where she fits. At the same time, she wishes that she had lived in a world in which her black heritage would have been more present and validated.

I really wish I would have been able to grow up around more black children. I feel like I missed a big part of culturethe majority of the people in my life are white. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

I wonder how Maylynn's stories to live by around racial identity might have shifted in different ways had this wish been a reality. Dewey's (1938/1997) principle of interaction of experience tells us that "objective and internal conditions" (p. 42)—the social and personal (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)—come together to form a "*situation*" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 42). Having different people in her life with different cultural and racial experiences would likely have created different situations in which she would have composed different stories to live by around race.

As with stories told around physical appearance, race, and racial identity, stories that Maylynn told around issues of gender and sexuality also revealed a linkage between her stories of family and stories of self.

My dad and Yaya are very close. That's because my grandfather was an abusive alcoholic My grandfather wasn't a very supportive guy. My dad is sort of feminine. He's not like, I mean, he's a big muscular man, but personality-wise he just doesn't fit that gender binary. And you know, he never really made his father proud Actually the gender binary is more strongly imposed from the outside and the inside on communities of color. Um, hyper-masculinity in the black community, and um, you know, femininity. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

As a young person Maylynn knew that her sexuality did not fit the dominant story being told within the communities where she found herself. Her initial response was to label her sexuality as "creepy", and attempt to expunge it from her life. As she matured, and also when in a less conservative environment, Maylynn was able to acknowledge her sexuality,

being black, being queer. I didn't come out to myself until I was 16 . . . just being like, growing up I was always the tallest. I was the largest, slightly darker in skin tone and obviously queer.

So you're saying obviously . . . you think obvious to others, or obvious to you?

To myself. And I was so scared what would happen. I told myself that I wasn't for so many years, and you know, I'd stand in line to go back into the classroom from recess and be like, how would I say it? "[Maylynn], you're not gay. That's creepy of you to do that, as a large black child." So I just sort of erased . . .

To do what? You said, "That's creepy of you to do that . . ."

To be attracted to things that are not masculine. For reference, I'm pansexual . . . Growing up I would try to erase any forms of sexuality in my personality. You know, I denied ever being attracted to someone, because that would just, I mean even if they were masculine, that's not for me, that's not for me to act on. I'm not allowed that. Just myself being gross in character, I did not have the freedom that other children had to explore.

In that conservative environment?

Yes.

(Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

Maylynn heard the telling and retelling of dominant stories of the gender binary, often from her father and Yaya.

On multiple occasions I have tried to educate both my father and Yaya, I remember when my dad was teaching me to drive we were having a discussion about Caitlin Jenner. And, you know, I had to explain to my father what it means to be a real woman, and it has nothing to do with what you are physically born as. And, um, I'm currently kind of with a trans woman, explaining that to Yaya was very difficult. Not that she's unaccepting; she just doesn't really understand drifting away from the gender binary or changing your gender. So she's like oh, so he thinks she's a woman. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

Stories of how to appropriately live the gender binary as a black female have been told to her by not only her father and grandmother, but also by the broader society as voiced through social media.

I'll see posts on Instagram of acceptance of feminine body hair, and that's great, but it's always white women. The moment a black woman decides to not shave she's disgusting and she's awful. If she doesn't put on makeup, if she doesn't relax her hair, doesn't take care of her nails and stuff, then she is not really a woman.

So, where are those messages coming from?

I feel it from Yaya and her family members, but also just images and stories I see on Instagram and Twitter and stuff.

So, those are stories and messages that are coming from the white community or the black community?

Both.

And, while she hears these messages being strongly voiced by the black community, she sees the composition of these stories originating in the white community.

And why do you think they are?

Well, it's internalized racism, given by the white community and perpetuated in communities of color . . . Most stories we accept are you know, white stories, and we're supposed to accept them as universal. But when you hear a black story it's just a black story. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

These story fragments reveal the complex interconnectedness of Maylynn's stories to live by and the tensions that arise as her stories and dominant stories of race, gender, sexuality, and physical appearance bump against each other.

Spaces of Belonging

I was drawn deeply into Maylynn's stories that are permeated with tensions around her attempts to locate and create spaces where she feels accepted and validated while living in personal and social contexts that communicate to her that she is expected to yield to the views, opinions, and values of others.

Why do I take up space, or attached to that why am I not allowed to take up that space? . . . Why must I get out of the way for them? (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

As I reflected upon Maylynn's "why?" questions I was drawn into wonderings of my own. What contexts—people, places, and situations—I wondered contributed to her

storying herself as a person who is expected to yield to others, and I was drawn to this story fragment.

There is this exercise I've been trying to do. I heard about it on Twitter, I wish I could source it, a long time ago. This girl was trying an experiment where wherever she walked, sidewalk, crossing the street, whatever, hallway, she wouldn't get out of the way of men. She'd constantly be bumped on the shoulder or just like ran into, because they just didn't see her as an entity that needed space to go through. I've been trying it too. It is interesting because I do run into people. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

This story fragment also surfaced in my thinking as I walked across campus about a week after Maylynn shared this story with me. I decided to try this experiment for a short period of time—about a half-mile or ten minutes.

As is customary, I was careful to walk on the right side of the sidewalk to be respectful of others' space. When a pedestrian walking alone approached me, of course, we simply passed each other staying on our respective sides of the walkway. However, when a group of pedestrians approached who were taking space on my side of the sidewalk, the young women almost invariably yielded while the young men did not. One time I was forced off the sidewalk into the street in order to pass a group of males. (Researcher's journal, March 28, 2017)

It seemed that they had not even noticed my presence. I wonder if they have come to expect a certain privilege based on their gender. A few months later my husband and I were taking a walk in our neighborhood.

We were walking two abreast down a sidewalk. Approaching us, also walking two abreast, were another man and woman. Usually, in such a situation either Ken or I fall behind and move to the right so as to occupy only half the sidewalk allowing the other walkers to pass on their half. This time, however, well before reaching us the couple stepped off the sidewalk into the street. I was troubled when I saw that the man and woman were Asian. I was even more troubled when I saw that as soon as they passed us they returned to the sidewalk. They had yielded their space to us, and I wondered if our white skin communicated to them that we deserved space and they did not. I felt ashamed by our unearned privilege. (Researcher's journal, June 12, 2017)

It seems that the yielding or not yielding of sidewalk space is a physical expression of privileges bestowed upon and claimed by certain groups of people, and the

denial of and habituated yielding of physical space is intimately connected with the denial of emotional, mental, and social spaces, which is demeaning and robs a person of their humanity. This is reflected in Maylynn's stories about mental health challenges that she and members of her family have experienced and dominant narratives told about mental health and mental illness.

Why am I a nasty creature? Why do I have mental illness? (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017)

Stories of mental illness have been lived, told, retold, and relived from generation to generation in Maylynn's family: her grandfather's alcoholism, her father's depression, her mother's anorexia, her own anxiety. Even the habit of self-depreciation shared by her mother and maternal grandmother might be a manifestation of mental illness. Maylynn has recognized that living, telling, reliving, and retelling (Huber et al., 2013) of those stories are impacted by shifting social contexts.

Of course there is a stigma towards mental illness in our communities, but one thing I can talk about is in the African American community, where like, under what circumstances that only white people can be the victim of mental illness? Something I've heard from Yaya, both to my father and myself, just you have food, you have a house, you have clothing, maybe pray about it, what could you be unhappy about? The fact that you are alive is enough. Get over it, stuff like that. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Maylynn's father has not sought out treatment for his depression. I wonder if he is retelling and reliving stories that have been told to him by his mother and the African American community.

I think that's because she is a product of that time where you have to get over it. There was this idea that there is no black people with mental illness, that's a white person thing My dad . . . he doesn't have treatment for his depression. He just keeps going; trucking along. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

I also wonder if Maylynn's mother's decision to seek treatment for her anorexia is a living out of the story that mental illness is a white person's illness. For her it is socially acceptable to acknowledge it; she has the privilege of being able to seek help. But, Maylynn also tells of a generational difference—a difference between Yaya, her father, and herself. In the face of struggles to understand her anxiety and why she has been burdened with it she has composed a new story, one that says that an African American can have mental illness and that it is acceptable to seek treatment.

Then there is me who is lucky enough to go to a therapist every now and then.
(Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

I wondered about how it came to be that she was able to tell and live a different story around mental illness than the one that she has heard told from the black community and relived and retold by her Yaya and father.

But, now you, there is a different narrative being told . . . that narrative of black people can't have mental illness . . . Now you are living a different narrative about that. How do you think that happened? Do you think you retold the narrative or do you think the retelling of that narrative is broader than that?

I think it's broader than that. I think it's a community change. I don't have substantial evidence for that but social media. I follow an artist on Twitter, and she is bipolar, and she makes art specific to her disorder, which I think is really cool, but she is also black. I think making black mental illness public and taking the stigma away from it through representation. I think that sort of changes within and outside the community. Of course, the change isn't 100%, because of course Yaya is still unsympathetic, and my dad doesn't get treatment.
(Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Even as she composed this story she knows that the dominant stories around mental illness in both the black and white communities are difficult to counter. The intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, mental illness, and white privilege constrain her ability to tell and live this counterstory as she attempts to compose a life for herself.

There is also this huge idea that if you work hard you can achieve anything. In some ways that may be true, but that also comes from a voice of privilege. There are going to be certain obstacles for different demographics. No matter how good you do, if you are not a white able bodied male, then there are going to be obstacles that are going to prevent you from reaching success at the rate of that person, such as mental illness. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

While the bumpings of stories told by members of her family and the black community around mental illness may have contributed to the creation of Maylynn's "why?" questions, her questioning of her right to space and wondering why others do not allow her space seem to come from a more complex interaction of experiences that take place in a variety of contexts. As Maylynn and I spoke about her stories of experience that revolve around her efforts to find spaces of belonging I was reminded of Lindemann Nelson's (1995; 2001) work involving found and chosen communities¹⁵. I could see that she was telling stories about her experiences in both of these types of communities, and I shared that with her. She responded with the following:

I think in found communities maybe I'm performing less. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Many of Maylynn's inside-of-school stories and outside-of-school stories were composed within found communities, where she often felt that she was either not allowed space or not worthy of space where she could live out her stories to live by including her story to live by of being a performer. A particularly strong thread that weaves through many of these stories is that of living in politically conservative contexts.

¹⁵ Lindemann Nelson (2001), drawing on the work of Marilyn Friedman, defines found communities as "the communities into which we are born and reared—families, neighborhoods, nations...[which tend] to exclude and suppress nongroup members while exploiting and oppressing certain members" (p. 9). Again, drawing on the work of Friedman, Lindemann Nelson (2001), explains that a chosen community is a "voluntary association", one in which the members may compose a "*counterstory*—a story that resist an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect" (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p. 6 citing Lindemann Nelson, 1995).

Very, very white . . . a lot of them very, very conservative It's scary stuff, and you know I was working with people, I was learning with people that you know, I'm sure they were okay, but fundamentally don't really support me as I am, as a person. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

For Maylynn, this environment engendered feelings of fear, intimidation, shame, and shamefulness.

I did not find a freedom of expression at school. Just art-wise, music-wise, anything-wise, it just wasn't -- I couldn't express myself fully. Not just because I'm -- I guess I'm a dirty liberal, but also like, being black, being queer . . . I was always the tallest. I was always the largest, slightly darker in skin tone, and obviously queer. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

Until her early teen years Maylynn lived in a rural area, just outside a college town, in the Midwest region of the United States. When she spoke about the school she attended from first through seventh grade she called it the “rural school” and often described both the school and the surrounding community as “conservative”.

*The teachers were just . . . very, very, conservative
It just kind of scared me a little
What does that mean for me?*

How much do you support me as a student?
(Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017)

The stories that Maylynn retold and relived within the context of the rural school often involved teachers that did not provide her with appropriate support both educationally and socially.

It kind of felt like other students got more help than I did It didn't really feel sufficient like, there'd be projects and I'd misread the instructions and I'd just keep going, and no one would notice that I was doing the project wrong until the very end. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

As Maylynn told this story I was reminded of her Yaya's insistence that she get her hair straightened, and I wondered if situations like this led Yaya to that determination. I wonder if perhaps the straightening of hair might have seemed a small price to pay in

order for her grandchild to get needed attention from her teachers. But other stories about her inside-of-school environment seem to indicate that racial prejudices persisted among both her teachers and her classmates even though she may have looked more like a white girl.

I would hear racist jokes all the time growing up at that rural school, and you know teachers would hear them too, but they wouldn't say anything back. Um, and, you know, if it was talked about it would be well that's their opinion, it's just a joke, you know, stuff like that. And jokes reveal more truth than anything. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

Maylynn also stories her teachers as being not only dismissive of her and her needs, but also openly intimidating. Even though she was not a direct target of that behavior, she learned to hide herself to avoid it, and she learned to yield her space to others.

I'm sure she's a nice woman, but at the time she was very intimidating to me, um, very tall, very shrill . . . I don't feel like I grew, or really learned. I kind of faked it till I made it, 'cause, um, at that time it didn't really matter if I was learning or not, I was just doing what I could, so she couldn't confront me loudly in front of the class . . . I was never that person, but still I was always scared I was going to do something wrong or stupid and then she'd say something and then everyone would know, and I'd feel guilty and embarrassed. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

She also learned that many of her classmates were people to be avoided.

Maybe it was like commentary I would hear between conversations from my dad and Yaya . . . if they identified as redneck, if they always wore camouflage or hunting color, talked about hunting deer, or shooting birds. If they talked about guns a lot, if they talked about any sort of weaponry a lot . . . I don't want, I'm not friends with you. (Maylynn, research conversation, December 14, 2016)

While living in the rural community, Maylynn would return home with stories of school. This moving between her found communities inside-of-school and outside-of-school provided her with the ability to *be* differently.

I feared what would happen if I was vocal, if I disagreed, so I just learned to be quiet . . . I would almost take like mental notes of like certain horrible things that people say, and I'd take them home, and you know, I'd tell my parents, and

we'd talk about them. So in a way, I was a completely different person at school than I was allowed to be at home. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

As Maylynn spoke I was again reminded of Lugones (1987) and her notion of “world” – travelling. For Maylynn the “world” inside-of-school constructed her as an outsider and that outsider status created a story to live by of a fearful, intimidated, quiet child who was not allowed space. As she traveled to the “world” of her family outside-of-school, where she was constructed as an insider—where she was at home—she was a child who could freely express herself. As Lugones (1987) points out, Maylynn was not “acting” differently in different “worlds” she was “shift[ing] from being one person to being a different person” (p. 11); this is what Lugones (1987) calls “‘world’ –travelling”.

But not all of her familial contexts allowed the space where she could *be* that different person who expressed herself. When travelling to the world of her white family, she once again found herself in a context where she is constructed as an outsider.

Any family gatherings with my white family, it's still sort of unpleasant. They're conservative. My aunt, uncle, and cousins, they're Mennonite, just very, very religious, conservative family. I do not talk much at all. I have to be very polite, reserved. I cannot tell my stories. A lot of things that help me make friends is just telling stories. Maybe it's unfortunate or odd, but a lot of my funniest stories are very lewd. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017)

However, she finds freedom of expression and a feeling of “just comfort” (Maylynn, research conversation, February, 23, 2017) when traveling to the world of her father’s family.

I can be louder. I think a good analogy might be churches . . . It's been a noted difference for over 100 years, the difference between white and black churches. A.M.E.s¹⁶, it might be more vocal. It's loud. Everyone is singing and clapping. There are tambourines. Praising out loud from the audience . . . In a white church it's very quiet. You sit. You worship very quietly. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017)

¹⁶ African Methodist Episcopal churches

I wonder if in the rural school teachers' lack of support with her academic work and their failure to defend her against racist comments contributed to her composing an identity that included storying herself as a child who was not worthy of her own space. As she travelled from the inside-of-school "world" to outside-of-school "worlds" of family she was able to compose a different story to live by, a story in which she could *be* a different person—a person who claims her space, who could be loud and vocal. Yet, the stories told in her family "worlds" did not always leave a space for this person. Yaya's stories of hair and physical appearance and the stories told by her white family members around appropriateness and acceptable behavior reminded her, and still remind her, that other "worlds" and the other identities still exist. Lugones (1987) explains, "those of us who are 'world' –travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and of having the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and ourselves in them" (p. 11).

When I reflected upon Maylynn's travels between inside-of-school and outside-of-school worlds I was reminded of the work of Clandinin and several of her colleagues (Clandinin et al., 2006) around curriculum making, familial curriculum making, and identity making and their realization that "all children, families, and teachers [are] curriculum makers when their lives met in schools and classrooms" (Huber et al., 2012, p. 6). In addition, Huber et al. (2012) came to see "many moments of tension" (p. 7) as children moved between their familial and school curriculum making places. Similarly, as Maylynn moved between her outside-of-school worlds and her inside-of-school multiple tensionalities arose.

For Maylynn, conservatism is synonymous with a lack of acceptance of difference. As someone who saw herself as different from almost everyone she came into contact with in her rural school and community she found it difficult to find or create a space of comfort and ease. Just prior to entering her eighth grade year her family moved from the rural setting into the small city where Midwest State University is located. Maylynn found herself in a context in which she felt a greater degree of belongingness.

There were people like me . . . still majority white . . . but there were children from all over because there were professors' kids. I thought that was really cool, and I got to talk to all new people. There were teachers that seemed to be more understanding, and when I asked for help I got it . . . just a lot more accepting atmosphere. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

It was within this context that she attended middle school and high school, and she characterized the community that she lived in as “a much better community” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016). As she moved to a less conservative context her inside-of-school and outside-of-school worlds changed such that she felt less different. The community, the teachers, and her peers provided her with a more open and accepting environment. In this environment, as she came together with her teachers and peers, the inside-of-school curriculum making changed such that she was able to claim more space for herself, begin to recompose her stories to live by, and *be* a different person. Yet, except for one particular teacher, the teachers “would . . . not really notice” her (Maylynn, research conversation, December 14, 2016).

From the time Maylynn was a child in her rural school through her movements to less conservative—or more liberal—contexts, Maylynn’s chosen communities have provided her with varying degrees of space where she can also *be* that different person.

I’m going to share more embarrassing stories with the chosen communities . . . that’s where, I don’t know, that’s where I’m going to put on the fishnet and tell

the lewd stories That's where I become a performer. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

One of Maylynn's chosen communities is the theater world. Initially, her Meemaw chose the theater world for her as a constructive after school activity. As she became drawn into being a performer and enjoying the act of performance, it became a community that she chose for herself.

I'm a theater major. I've always really loved performing. I started doing musicals when I was ten. When my parents worked I would alternate days who I stayed with. It would be with either my white grandmother or my black grandmother. And, as I was getting older I needed better activities to do than crafts so my grandmother signed me up for a musical. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

Beginning with her first role as a child and as she journeyed through elementary school, middle school, high school, and now in her college years she has found the theater to be a place that not only brings her joy, but also a world in which she can more authentically express herself in multifaceted ways.

Even so, this is not always entirely the case. Being a person who physically appears racially ambiguous to the eyes of others, Maylynn is often cast as a white character generally in casts that consist of mostly white actors. As in other contexts, such as school settings, in which she is one of a few or the only person of color or person with multiple racial heritages, Maylynn wonders,

*Where do I go?
Which do I belong with?
I'm by myself*

*It kind of feels like not really belonging
to one community or another*

(Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017)

However, when she was cast in the role of Chrissie in the musical *Hair*, she found a sense of belongingness among a cast of mostly black actors. She also found an opportunity to live her story of both performer and activist.

***I did Hair at the community theater
Really loved it***

***Tackling the subject of racial division
60s when it was written
Current – Black Lives Matter
More people of color in our cast
than white people***

***It was really cool
I was able to talk***

***Before – playing a white character
Usually, the token black person***

***I'm kind of racially ambiguous
I can play both***

***It's nice not playing white for once
More connected to other black members of the cast***

(Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017)

Transitioning from high school productions to adulthood and community theater combined with the production “tackling the subject of racial division not only in the ‘60s when it was written, but current matters” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016) provided a space in which Maylynn felt comfortable talking about race with her director and fellow cast members. She could *be* a different person in this context—a person that felt more authentic. This experience also afforded her the opportunity to live her stories to live by of performing artist and activist—through her art she contributed to providing the audience with a message of social justice.

Her strong personal commitment to social justice activism inspired her to recompose her imagined path to a future in which being an activist is central to her way

of living. As she entered her second semester at Midwest University (MWU) she felt an internal push to change her major to African American Studies with minors in Creative Writing and Women, Gender and Sexuality.

I still love performing in every way, but I recently changed my major to African American Studies. I want to be an activist. The idea is to do activist art. Protest Theater, like Theater of the Oppressed, so I can write and perform shows that challenge audiences to think about social problems. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

As she looked forward she began recomposing the story of her imagined future; she still has the “same plan...just found a better way to approach it” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017). With this new pathway she imagined that she would be better prepared to bring truth, authenticity, and substance to her work and to her audiences.

***Same plan – better way to approach it
Through representation***

***help people find their own identity
See someone like yourself***

(Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017)

While holding firm to this story of her imagined future, Maylynn once again made the decision to recompose her path. At the end of her freshman year she decided to leave Midwest University; she returned home to be close to the support of family as she continues to face her struggles with anxiety. The move, of course, took her back to the more conservative environment of that community and Midwest State University. As she told the story of this decision to me I wondered,

Something that took you to MWU was the more liberal environment, but then going back home put you back in what you describe as a relatively conservative environment.

It was what I needed for my mental health. It was the healthiest decision for me. And yes, while it is terrible in that respect, I have a support system to stand up

to it at the very least . . . It's important for me to train myself to resist. (Maylynn, research conversation, September 15, 2017)

Upon enrolling at MWSU Maylynn returned to her original major field of study, the theater. As she spoke about this decision, I felt a joy, peace, and contentment from her. It was once again saying,

I am a theater major. I've always loved performing. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2015)

With a Bachelor of Science in theater, a minor in ethnic studies, and the support of her family, Maylynn imagines that she will, at some point in time, leave home again to pursue her work as a representational and activist artist. She hopes that her work will inspire change.

Through representing the lives of others and exposing the impact of oppression in the lives of marginalized people she hopes to validate and emancipate those who are seen as “other”. She also hopes to educate those who oppress others and move them to a place of self-examination and a change in their orientation towards others. She knows that there are people who do not want to be educated, but she believes that her best hope of breaking through the conspiracy of blindness and silence is by representing the stories of lived experiences through art.

As she imagines this future she recognizes that her work will not be easy nor will she ever truly be finished.

For me to fail

*my audience didn't learn anything
didn't get anything from the experience*

For me to be successful

*my audience learned something
Some sort of small character change*

*Honestly, I don't think I would put myself out of business
whatever I'm trying to change can't really be changed fully in one generation.*

It's an endless thing.

(Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017)

Intimately connected to Maylynn's stories to live by of representational artist and social justice activist is her commitment to living in a moral and ethical space both personally and socially.

Is this really right for me to do? . . it's just kind of an in-between area of can I say this? (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

She cultivates and nurtures an authentic voice and takes great exception to others who speak inauthentically or appropriate the voices of others.

Morally I could play both black and white if I wanted

If I played a part that was not black or white

That's wrong

It's not for me to take that

***it's what effects you have on the audience
if I did – telling the audience it's okay
to erase***

Making sure your art is socially conscious

(Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017)

The taking of a role in which she would portray a character that is not black or white is something that Maylynn finds to be morally abhorrent as it would be an act of theft and deception. She explained that it would tell “the audience it's okay to erase” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017), or silence, the authentic portrayal of the character, and it would infringe upon the rights of her fellow actors. This would be using her talents and her voice to oppress rather than emancipate. It would be contrary to her commitment to “making sure that your art is socially conscious, and that your audience is given the correct theme” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017).

In this quest for a moral voice Maylynn understands that the criteria for judging morality is often unclear, unspoken, and situational. Different people can speak the same

words, and depending on the speaker's identity, who that speaker is in relation to the listener, and who that speaker is in relation to the topic it may or may not be a moral act.

... what things you can say, like, what opinions you're allowed or beliefs you're allowed to express or share with others. What you're allowed to speak on. For example, in English [at MWU] we did presentations on Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison and we had a group of four white guys do a presentation on masculinity and father and son relationships in Song of Solomon and also the Common Book by Ta-Nehisi Coates, and they did a part examining black father and son relationships. And the entire time I'm like, maaaaaybe you shouldn't be talking about this, not you. And that's kind of how I feel about myself sometimes. Like, I know that I do have valid input but I know that mine is going to be so much different from someone who is darker than myself. But, then again, I'm, it's going to be more right for me to say certain things than someone who is completely white to say. Um, like, okay, so, after the failure to indict Darren Wilson, um, I started a small protest. Um, and you know, it felt good at the time to like put myself out there, but at the same time, is this really right for me to do, 'cause, at the same time I am black, but there's less violence towards me. I'm going to be humanized more than people who are darker than myself. So, it's just kind of an in-between area of can I say this? (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016)

Maylynn sees that her multiple racial heritages combined with her light skin and racially ambiguous physical appearance puts her in a space of moral uncertainty; she wonders if she is black enough to speak as a black person. But she also recognizes that this "in between area" (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016) affords her an opportunity to be heard when others may not be. I wonder if this in-betweenness provides Maylynn with a personal space to compose her imagined future, and a social space where it can manifest in the world. I also wonder if this in-betweenness has helped her understand that in order for her to be successful as a performer and activist she must not only tell truthful stories about others she must also be truthful about herself to herself and to others.

The stories to live by that Maylynn has composed and continues to compose around being a performer have bled into aspects of her life beyond the theater and the stage; she lives the performer identity in many of her chosen communities.

[In a found community] it's just . . . I just exist, but in [a chosen community] it's [to] exist and to perform.

Because performance is so central to who you are, am I hearing you say that in your chosen communities you are able to express that central element of your identity in a more open way?

Mm-hmm, because performing is not just on stage, I just love telling stories, jokes, and stuff.

Performing is more than, I am on the stage and I'm going to dance for you. Performing is how you interact with people?

Mm-hmm.

(Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

While living in the rural community, Maylynn's ability to choose a community of friends in which she felt safe and accepted was limited.

Well, it was always, of course, the same 60 kids. I came in first grade and it was, I don't know, pretty obvious from the start who . . . I don't know, are respectful and I can be respectful back and we can be friends. That pool of safe people might be the same as the close people because that's kind of all you have. There were really good friends but it probably was because that pool of safe people was so small. (Maylynn, research conversation, December 14, 2016)

This changed when her family moved to the less conservative environment.

I like to believe that I wasn't funny before I was 12, and now that I have better friends I have developed a sense of humor. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

Hearing Maylynn tell this story of her self I was once again reminded of Lugones's (1987) notion of "world" –travelling and her understanding of "shift[ing] from being one person to being a different person" (p. 11) in different worlds. I wondered if Maylynn's relocation from the rural community to a less conservative context allowed

her to both find a community (her new school) and choose a community (her new friends) where she could *be* funny. However, even within this chosen community of friends the existence of this space, or her right to that space, feels tenuous and uncertain.

With my friends I feel like I'm still sometimes performing to make sure that they still want to be around me. Sometimes when I have depressive episodes, sometimes I want to be around people, but also I don't want them to have to be around me when I'm not fun because I'm like, "what if they don't hang out with me anymore after this?" It feels very temporary . . . I'd like to elaborate that I'm not being fake with my friends, I just sometimes feel that I must be endearing for them to continue being with me. That's sort of a difference between found at least with my family found and the chosen, at least friend chosen. (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

She knows that there will always be a space for her when she is in the found community comprised of her parents and Yaya, but the certainty of that space diminishes as she moves to other found communities, such as extended family and school, and even when with her friends in her chosen community. Yet, when she “world” –travels (Lugones, 1987) to her chosen community, she composes a story in which she is being and becoming a performing artist. In this world she is creating her own space and composing a counterstory to the ones that lead her to question her right to space.

So, last semester I was joking with some friends that we should start a band, and we had compiled a bunch of band names, and decided on Yarn. We didn't officially meet until I called that day and we wrote like two songs. We haven't met since, which is kind of bad, but ideally, we could have a little band, and we'd talk about social justice . . . it could also be like performance art, 'cause there'd be dancing, there'd be small monologues in between songs. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

As Maylynn's high school years drew to a close, and she began to consider where she would attend college, she decided on Midwest University for her inside-of-school community because, for her, the less conservative environment would be a “better situation” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016).

At MWU I feel like it's a better situation, we have honestly better teachers than at MWSU, 'cause that is going to be a much more conservative place. I know that's a very broad statement, but their main thing is agriculture and football.
(Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

I wonder if this decision was born out of a desire to choose a community in which she would be able to find space or create space for herself. Not only did she choose MWU she also chose communities within that chosen community where she might find space. For example, during one of our early conversations I asked Maylynn about her decision to join the organization through which I contacted her, an organization that serves multiracial and multicultural students.

Before I came to MWU, sometime during the summer, my friend . . . was looking at clubs to join. I was like, I should look at clubs to join, and I just kind of signed up for everything that I related to.

I was wondering what you hoped for when you joined.

Well, I wanted to meet people like me.
(Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

This led me to also wonder about her decision to join this research study.

Then what about this study? Why did you respond to my email? What were you hoping for with your participation in this study?

I think you have a really good goal for helping teachers understand students like me. But also, it's good for me to talk about this kind of stuff.
(Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

I wondered if the reading of my recruitment email—an experience nested within the context of a chosen community within her inside-of-school contexts—provided her with the sense that this study might have the potential to become an additional chosen community where she might be able to find or create a space for herself within our conversations. This reminded me that narrative inquiry research “conversations create a

space for the voices and stories of both participants and researchers to be heard and composed” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 189).

Clandinin and Caine (2013) explain,

The inquiry space opens up a space to see the knots that live within each of our lives’ fabrics, and how these are interwoven into the experiences under study.

While our intention is not to engage in therapeutic processes or to heal, the process of narrative inquiry can be therapeutic, that is, it can draw attention to the difficult places, times, or contexts in which we all live (p. 195).

As Maylynn said,

it’s good for me to talk about this kind of stuff. (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

Many of Maylynn’s stories around growing up, both inside-of-school stories and outside-of-school stories, are stories that have been lived out on landscapes in which she was expected to yield to members of a socially dominant group. And in those landscapes she was often told oppressive stories, stories that deny her space to live and tell her stories to live by on her own terms. As she moved between contexts and “world” – travelled (Lugones, 1987), Maylynn has been able to be and become a person who is finding and creating spaces of belonging. In this being and becoming she recognizes that her position within and between the black community and the white community both aids and deters that effort.

I’m not completely white passing, but I have light-skinned privilege. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

Extrapolating from Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, Alexander (2004) argues that “whiteness has to be acknowledged as something that is performed,

something that does something in the world It has to be something linked with access, the social construction of power, worth and value—that leads to the . . . practice of privilege” (p. 650). He goes on to explain that whiteness is distinct from being white, which is “just that, *a state of being* defined by social interpretations of pigmentation or melanin” (p. 655).

For Maylynn, acting white, or performing whiteness, means not behaving in ways that are storied as acting black.

That means not using Ebonics. That would mean putting back my hair or straightening it or trying to hide the curl; maybe doing my makeup paler; not eating spicy food that much. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

But she also understands that acting white means acting with privilege and that her light skin brings with it the ability to access that privilege. She describes a space in which she is “not completely white passing...incognegro¹⁷” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017). Here she finds that being in an in-between space brings with it a unique advantage; in this space she sees herself as “a transient figure” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017) allowing her the ability to travel between “worlds” and be listened to in both “worlds” (Lugones, 1987).

I benefit from colorism¹⁸, so in that way I am much closer to being a white person, and my voice is going to be validated more by white people than someone who’s darker than myself. . . . I have the ability to speak on my experiences as being black, but I’m going to be respected more than someone who is darker than myself. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017)

¹⁷ Similar to passing, incognegro is a term used to convey the idea that a person of African-American heritage is not recognized as such or seen by others as white. This may be the result of being physically racially ambiguous or because the person is attempting to conceal his or her racial heritage. *Incognegro* is also the title of a 2008 graphic novel written by Mat Johnson, and a 2015 memoir by Frank B. Wilderson, III titled *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid*.

¹⁸ Colorism is the “European colonial habit of creating color hierarchies” (Robinson, 2011, p. 361) that values lighter skin over darker skin, and discriminating or privileging people based on their supposed position on that hierarchy.

It is from this space—where she is always a member of the black community, always a member of the white community, and always in-between both communities—where Maylynn sees an opening for her voice to be heard as a representational and activist artist. Her experiences as a black person give her the credibility and moral authority to tell stories of discrimination and oppression. Her access to the white community, through both her experiences and her physical appearance, allows her to speak to and be heard by white audiences. The space where the telling of and the hearing of these stories meet is where she hopes to contribute to the emancipation of the oppressed and the education of the oppressors. As a transient figure in this in-between space she hopes to capitalize upon her access to white privilege in order to contribute to the dismantling of it.

Self-portrait – a Visual Expression of Multiple Stories to Live By

At the close of our third conversation I asked Maylynn to create a visual representation of significant events, happenings, and experiences of her life. I explained that she could create a timeline, but it could take whatever form she thought would best express how she saw her experiences fitting together. I asked her about it at the beginning of our next conversation, and although she said she had it completed she had not brought it

Figure 2. Maylynn's Graphic Annal



Figure 2. Maylynn's visual representation of significant events, happenings, and experiences in her life.

with her. So, we began our fifth research conversation by talking about her drawing (see Figure 2). Before revealing her creation she described it as “nothing extravagant” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017), but I found it to be remarkable and provocative.

She named it a self-portrait, and as she spoke about the meaning of the rat body, the insect arms, the fishnet and garter adorned legs, and the tail forming the word “why” I realized that this picture is a metaphor of not only her lived experiences but also the complex and multiple stories she tells about herself and others have told about her.

I know you said to do something with events that represented my life and it just kind of turned into a self-portrait . . . It's a rat with human limbs and fishnets. As you can see, there are extra joints and six fingers and only one shoe. The tail spells out why.

Why a rat?

I sort of identify with them . . . I love rats. Everyone thinks they're kind of nasty, but actually they're as clean as cats. They clean themselves . . . I don't know. I just feel nasty a lot, but I'm not...I guess this is sort of a performance thing, like theater.

Tell me about the arms.

It's kind of bug-like. I thought it was kind of creepy . . . It's just a nasty creature, but also with showmanship.

This is so very interesting...

It's not a chronological thing. It's just kind of here it is.

When I think about it . . . had you brought something that was more like, first I did this and then I did this and this happened and this happened, that would not have been consistent with who you've told me that you are. A lot of your story speaks about representational art. That's what this is, representational art.

A strong and binding thread that weaves through many of Maylynn's stories is that of being and becoming a representational artist. It was immediately evident to me

that in the creation of this image she was telling and living that story, a story that could not have been represented by a listing of events or timeline.

And the word “why”, the question “why”?

Why am I a nasty creature? Why do I have mental illness and stuff like that? Why do we exist? . . . It’s just a general self-esteem thing, like I am a bug. I am gross.

(Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017)

When Maylynn first revealed her self-portrait to me I was overwhelmed by her unique, creative approach and the obvious complexities represented in the image. I asked her for some time to reflect upon it and if we could discuss it again during our next conversation. She, of course, agreed. I began our next conversation with some of my thoughts about her self-portrait.

I started looking at [your self-portrait], really looking at it I started seeing this resonance between that and many of the stories that you’ve shared about how others see you. The stories about your hair and your skin and your makeup and your body size, your gender identity, your multiracialness, it’s kind of all wrapped up in that representation right there.

It is.

All of those are stories that either imply or directly state, some of them state that you need to change yourself for society in some ways?

Yes

While you are simultaneously living and telling a story that expresses your own value and your own right to proclaim that you are good enough just the way you are.

Mm-humm.

(Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

In my reflections upon her stories and her self-portrait I began to see that although she did not intend for the picture to be a chronological listing of events it does hold a sense of temporality. In combination, the elements of her self-portrait—the body, the

arms, the legs, and the tail—represent stories of experiences that reach backward to past events, are pulled forward to this representation, and point toward an imagined future. In addition, this self-portrait expresses the personal and social aspects of her stories, stories that have been composed as she has interacted with family members, friends, teachers, peers, and others.

By portraying herself as the combination of a rat—often perceived as dirty and diseased—and a bug that Maylynn sees as “kind of creepy...just a nasty creature” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017), she has represented stories of race, physical appearance, and gender and sexuality that place her outside dominant narratives. These stories have brought her to identify with creatures that are often reviled by society. One of those creatures—a rat—uses its tail to aid in maintaining its balance when traversing thin objects such as a rope or a pipe (The rat’s tail, 2012). In other words, the rat uses its tail to find and maintain a space of equilibrium—a space where it can belong, or fit, upon the object without falling to one side or the other. While keeping this knowledge in the back of my mind I reflected upon Maylynn’s choice to twist the tail of the rat to form the word “why” and her elaborations about the meanings embedded in that word. I came to see the tail as representative of her questioning her right to space and the denial of others to allow her space to be who she is—“a poor, black, queer, woman” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 13, 2017).

Also embedded in her self-portrait through her choice of a rat’s body are her stories of cultivating an authentic, moral character through how she presents herself to the world even when others may not value her, her voice, or her stories to live by. This is representative of a person who has hidden, or unrecognized, beauty, value, and worth,

like a rat that is despised by humans but fastidiously grooms itself to stay clean and healthy thus creating a beautiful, shiny coat.

I love rats. Everyone thinks they're kind of nasty, but actually they're clean as cats . . . I just feel nasty a lot, but I'm not. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 23, 2017)

As we spoke about my reflections upon her self-portrait I relayed to her that from what I knew of her stories I wondered if the legs represent a force of forward movement in her life, a pushing herself to grow as a person, and her strength of character and determination as she composes stories of herself and her imagined future. In this way, it seemed to me that the legs represented in some ways her future. She agreed with my interpretation, but added that the legs—with fishnets and garters—are representative of her sexuality, pride in performance, and self-expression.

I was . . . thinking in sort of, as a little bit burlesque-like¹⁹, it's representing the sexuality in my personality . . . There is also a lot of pride in performance and expression, and having an audience to actually want to hear what you have to say. They want you to take up that space, which is in contrast with this monstrous monster. (Maylynn, research conversation, February 20, 2017)

As I looked upon her drawing of “burlesque-like” legs and reflected upon her stories of gender and sexuality I was reminded that she stories herself as a person who tells “lewd” stories when amongst friends who are members of her chosen communities. I wondered if these legs and those lewd stories are both counterstories that communicate that the dominant story is not the only story of value—her story has value, too. I wondered if the legs in her self-portrait not only represent her sexuality, but also express a desire to push

¹⁹ Burlesque: “an artistic composition, especially literary or dramatic, that, for the sake of laughter, vulgarizes lofty material or treats ordinary material with mock dignity . . . also . . . a humorous and provocative stage show featuring slapstick humor, comic skits, bawdy songs, striptease acts, and a scantily clad female chorus” (“Burlesque | Define burlesque at dictionary.com,” 2017).

against dominant stories told about gender and sexuality. In response to that wondering Maylynn told me,

It's kind of a form of resistance for a person at a crooks of oppression, to love yourself is resistance and to perform in such a way, to express your sexuality like that, that's making itself representative, making yourself known. And that's resistance. (Maylynn, research conversation, September 15, 2017)

So, yes, indeed, Maylynn was pushing against, resisting, dominant stories of gender and sexuality through the act of self-expression, self-representation, and self-love.

While Maylynn described the elements—the body, the arms, the legs, and the tail—in somewhat separate terms, it was impossible for me to say that any particular story fit exclusively with any particular element. In fact, using peripheral vision (Bateson, 1994)—focusing on each element and then softening my gaze to see what is on the edges—I came to see that this image embodies the continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938/1997) of her experiences. As I wrote this narrative account I pulled on threads that are closely tied to each element, yet they simultaneously infiltrate other elements, thus binding the image together into a representation of the wholeness of her stories of experiences and stories to live by.

Embodied in the image of a rat with bug-like yet human multi-jointed arms are stories of family, race and physical appearance, racial identity, performance, and whiteness and white privilege. The tail expresses stories of struggle to find a space of belonging in the changing contexts of her found and chosen communities, as she has struggled with anxiety, her sexual orientation, her racial identity and physical appearance. The legs—strong, full of movement, and adorned with burlesque-like stockings—embody stories of gender and sexuality, performance and activism, and living a moral life. In this way this artistic representation of her stories became a portal through which I

came to an understanding of her experiences. As a viewer of this piece of representational art, I was moved by the poignancy of the message conveyed.

Imagining an Inside-of-School of Space

During many of our conversations involving Maylynn's inside-of-school experiences she told stories around being fearful of her teachers and not feeling accepted by her peers. She often silenced herself in order to reduce the possibility that she might become a target. In response I often asked her to imagine what would have been better for her in those spaces. At the center of her imagined inside-of-school world are positive, supportive teacher-student relationships in which she would be respected and her presence would be valued.

It's crucial to me developing, to actually learning the subject because I'm not really going to pay attention if I'm scared of you. (Maylynn, research conversation, December 14, 2016)

In such relationships teachers and authority figures would protect her from prejudice, bigotry, and racism²⁰.

I would hear racist jokes all the time growing up at that rural school. Teachers would hear them too, but they wouldn't say anything back.

Why do you think they didn't address them?

Because they agreed with the joke, they thought it was funny too.

And what if there would have been a teacher who didn't agree with it? What if that teacher would have addressed it?

²⁰“**Prejudice** is when a person negatively pre-judges another person or group without getting to know the beliefs, thoughts, and feelings behind their words and actions. A person of any racial group can be prejudiced towards a person of any other racial group. There is no power dynamic involved. Bigotry is stronger than prejudice, a more severe mindset and often accompanied by discriminatory behavior. It's arrogant and mean-spirited, but requires neither systems nor power to engage in. **Racism** is the system that allows the racial group that's already in power to retain power. Since arriving on U.S. soil white people have used their power to create preferential access to survival resources (housing, education, jobs, food, health, legal protection, etc.) for white people while simultaneously impeding people of color's access to these same resources” (Irving, 2017).

Well, the people who did that would have been confronted . . . and told what they're saying is wrong . . . maybe an apology, and maybe they'd be educated on it . . . the person in the room who has authority has to say something.

(Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

Teachers would also ensure that her work would not be co-opted by those with privilege.

I don't like group work . . . I always found that I was the one who was doing the most work. I feel like if I looked different, then maybe they wouldn't take advantage of my labor, because I noticed in school, a lot of, it was mostly women who did most of the work in group work, because all the guys were just looking at their phone in their basketball shorts and not really doing anything,

So, it's a gender role issue?

It might be a gender, possibly, but also, it could be a racial thing, but I couldn't really say because those schools I went to were so majority white.

So, for a teacher who's goal is to help their students learn to work collaboratively, what is that the teacher could have done?

It could be good if celebrating the labor of women, and encouraging more labor from those who do not contribute . . . It's important to say that there's a difference between, I'm sorry to bring in stereotypes, but the athletic white guy, there's a difference between him choosing to just not participate and someone who's crying for help.

(Maylynn, research conversation, April 13, 2017)

Teachers would be supportive guides who attend to their students' academic and emotional needs. They would come to know their students as individuals so that they would be able to provide them with the necessary assistance in the most appropriate manner while allowing them the space to make independent decisions about their work and academic interests. They would not be overly intrusive or subject students to public scrutiny. This became clear as Maylynn told stories that revealed tensions she felt as she interacted with her teachers.

Elementary school gifted education teacher:

Fourth grade, I wrote an illustrated book. I remember, we would go, and we would be like four or five students at a time . . . she'd read what I wrote, and she'd critique my work out loud, while other students were in the room. That was embarrassing and unnecessary.

(Maylynn, research conversation, December 14, 2016)

High school gifted education teacher:

If she wanted to have an impromptu meeting, she'll just find you. She'll follow you.

Is that a good thing?

Not at the time, but I understand where she was coming from.

(Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

High school English teacher:

I remember one time, my senior year of high school, I had this AP teacher and she scared me. Both AP English teachers were so bad but I switched to the other one thinking she was better and she wasn't. She just kind of did these invasive things for senior year of high school, like checking your English notes to make sure they were up to her standards instead of just letting you take notes your own way. That made me nervous. (Maylynn, December 14, 2016)

College foreign language instructor:

Communication was poor . . . it was just a game of phone tag for two weeks trying to set up a meeting and him not responding. It's also a situation during the class. If I don't know what I'm saying or what I'm supposed to say, he'll just sit and wait there for me to guess instead of helping me, which isn't great. Putting you on the spot when you don't feel like you really have, I don't have the skill level.

Involvement-wise, for you, the ideal teacher would be somewhere between him and your high school gifted teacher?

Yeah, Somewhere....

I know especially that I thrive educationally when I feel safe . . . when I can ask those questions. When there's no such thing as a stupid question. Also, where you're allowed to just throw out ideas, where you're allowed to just get weird, where you're allowed to be vulnerable together and create that stuff....

I'm hearing you now and I think in the past, really talking about respect for students and involving students in decision making processes and allowing student to also have autonomy in their lives, autonomy with guidance is what you're saying, I think is what I'm hearing you say.

Yes!

(Maylynn, research conversation, December 14, 2016)

Maylynn also imagined a space in which she could feel that she and her teachers have common experiences and shared identities. This would open a safe space where she could interact with her teachers.

I saw on Twitter a while ago, it was an article re-tweeted from one of the activists I follow, that they did a study on young black boys and young black men, that those who had at least one black teacher in the grades three through five graduated high school at a higher rate, which I think is really interesting because I was lucky enough not to drop out. But had I had a teacher that looked like me, I would have had a more fulfilling experience . . . I'd feel a lot safer. I would ask a lot more questions. I wouldn't be afraid to throw out different ideas. The education would be more volleying back and forth instead of regurgitating information. I realized when I read that article I've never had a black teacher before I came to college. I never had one, and I only had one teacher of color during all of that. That kind of intimidated me, because I'd have teachers where I'd get kind of scared of them, or maybe I just didn't like them because I had a certain fear of them, so maybe I wouldn't come to class, or maybe I just wouldn't turn in the work, maybe I wouldn't work as hard on the work. Stuff like that. I'd just avoid them in general. (Maylynn, research conversation, April 13, 2017)

These experiences led Maylynn to conclude that children who are not successful in their inside-of-school spaces are not simply being uncooperative, and teachers would be wise to look beneath simple surface explanations.

There's going to be a reason that students aren't doing well, because no one wants to do bad. To be failing a class I'd say is a cry for attention, purposely or accidentally. It's kind of just odd seeing people call children lazy. I mean, maybe there are lazy children out there, I'm sure there are. But it's probably something emotional if they're not wanting to participate in something. (Maylynn, research conversation, April 13, 2017)

When Maylynn looks beneath the surface she sees a school system that is unsuccessful at meeting the needs of all children. In her imagined inside-of-school space, it would be necessary to change the structure of school itself.

It's . . . a stigma against mental illness, which is very common in communities of color, and also it's sort of the way the education system is set up. It just doesn't work for some people. They have ADHD, and they just can't do tasks. They can't. They flat out; it just doesn't work. They often have brain fog. I've talked about this with other people. It'd be really cool to just start a commune. That's the ideal, that's the dream, to make a self-sustained community where we could just grow all our own stuff. . . and have education in a different route. (Maylynn, research conversation, April 13, 2017)

Maylynn imagines an inside-of-school space in which teachers and students come together in mutual respect and support to create curriculum that honors and celebrates all forms of diversity. Her imagined inside-of-school space would be a space in which children's lives are 'attended to as the curriculum [is] being made' (Huber & Clandinin, 2005, p. 319).

Chapter 5: Breanna

Coming into relationship with Breanna

Breanna called me just a few hours after I sent recruitment emails (see Appendix B) to the members of an organization at Midwest University that serves multiracial and multicultural students, faculty, and staff. She was wondering if she, a person who is genetically Korean, was born in Korea, adopted in the United States by white parents, and with two African American siblings, met participant requirements for this study. I explained, as was stated in the email, that what was important for study purposes was that participants self-identify as having multiple racial heritages. If that was true of her, then I was open to her participation in the study. She responded that, at this point in her life, she identified as white and Korean, but when she was younger she thought she was white. In response I said that I thought her stories of experience might add an interesting perspective to the study.

I suggested that we meet so I could explain the study in more detail and answer any questions she might have. To that end we arranged a meeting for the following afternoon in a study area of a classroom building at Midwest University. I arrived early for the meeting and positioned myself facing the entrance of the study area. As our meeting time approached a young Asian woman entered the room, our eyes connected, we smiled at each other, I waved at her, and she approached my table.

Mary Jo?

Yes, Breanna?

(She smiled and nodded her head.)

So glad to meet you; thank you for coming to talk with me.

We began our conversation by introducing ourselves. Breanna explained that she was in her senior year and would graduate the following spring. She again spoke of being adopted from Korea, and was quite excited to find a person interested in studying people with multiple racial heritages. I told her that I had been a teacher and school administrator for many years before deciding to leave my position as a school principal to pursue a doctoral degree full time. I explained that my interest in this particular inquiry grew out of my relationship with my grandson and my concerns and wonderings about his possible future experiences as a person with multiple racial heritages. I told her my hope was that this research might, in some way, aid teachers in their efforts to meet the needs of students with multiple racial heritages.

We spoke about the structure of the study and the anticipated time commitment on her part. It was clear to me from almost the beginning of the conversation that she intended to participate in the study, but I wanted to be sure that I provided as much information as I could and answer any questions she might have. I felt it was essential to beginning our relationship as co-inquirers.

I felt an excitement and developing comfort between us as we talked. I felt sure we could work together, talk together, and compose an inquiry together. I invited her to participate, and she accepted. I explained that before we could proceed she needed to provide formal, written consent through signing the university ethics document. I read and explained each section of the document to her, she signed it, and we scheduled our first research conversation for a few days later.

The Question of a Pseudonym

One required section of the informed consent form concerns participant anonymity. While discussing this with Breanna I explained she could choose a pseudonym, what she later called a “fake name” (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017), for use in the dissertation and in future publications. This would, I explained, aid in protecting her identity and the identity of other people who are part of her stories of experience. I asked her to think about it over the next few days and suggested we revisit the topic during our first research conversation.

Have you thought about a pseudonym that you would like to use during the study?

Oh, um...

...and if you haven't that's okay.

I haven't. I'm still debating, I mean, I feel like I really don't care if you use my name, but I'm still thinking.

(Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

As Breanna and I worked together we returned to this topic several times. She experienced choosing a pseudonym as a decision that needed great consideration. Initially, I was concerned about the anonymity aspects involved with her decision. After further reflection and discussing this with my response community I realized that I was missing something that was much more important and fundamental—her name as an expression of her stories to live by.

Names, specifically legal names in the United States and many western countries, identify us within our families and within society (Finch, 2008; Davies, 2011). As Finch (2008) explained,

my name has two dimensions. It marks me as a unique individual, and it also gives some indication of my location in the various social worlds which I inhabit – it encapsulates my legal persona . . . it reveals my gender and probably my ethnicity, it documents something of my family connections. (p. 709)

I see Finch's explanation as accurate but incomplete. While Finch focuses on a name as marker for identification purposes, I understand names—whether given or chosen—narratively in that names are storied phenomena. Names have stories attached to them and these stories are part of each person's embodied identity, their stories to live by.

For example, most people know me by the name Mary Jo, a label others use to identify me. But my name is a storied part of me. My parents chose this name as a combination of their names—Marita and Joseph—it connects me to them. My legal name is actually Mary Joan. This name marks me as Roman Catholic, and the story is that the parish priest would not baptize me with Jo as my middle name since there were no female saints named Jo. Being devout Catholics my parents yielded to the wishes of the priest and chose Mary Joan as my baptismal and legal names. However, at home, in school, and in my broader social contexts I am always known as Mary Jo, the name that expresses my stories to live by as a child of Marita and Joseph. I do not feel such a connection with the name Mary Joan. Another complication of my name is that I am often seen as Mary. Although I have become more tolerant of this as I have matured, Mary does not express who I am. I am Mary Jo. In claiming this name I claim my stories to live by.

As people compose lives, come into relationship with others, move from place to place and through time, we are often named and renamed. Sometimes our names locate us in larger institutional narratives. Sometimes naming and renaming is within a formal,

legal framework, as when one takes on a new surname after marriage, when a transgender person takes a new forename²¹ that better expresses their gender identity (Pilcher, 2005), or when an adopted person is given a new surname and possibly a new forename.

I contend that naming and renaming happens more frequently through the assignment of labels and words of description. For example, I am known by character traits such as conscientiousness, hard working, impatience, reserved, and caring. I am also known by physical traits, such as height. Additionally, I name myself by role identity such as wife, mother, grandmother, teacher, and graduate student. Sometime I name myself, and sometimes others name me, but all of these names influence how I enter the world, relate to others, and think about myself. For instance, in the past I did not think of myself as an impatient person, however having others name me impatient, and entering into periods of self-reflection regarding that name, I accept that as part of who I am, my stories to live by.

Bringing this thinking alongside my reflections about Breanna's stories of experience I could see through statements she made about herself, her "I" statements, she has, throughout her life, engaged in acts of naming and renaming herself. Her stories also reveal names others have given her that have profoundly impacted her personally and socially. Breanna's stories of being named and self-naming are quite complex across time and contexts. To illuminate this naming and renaming I have created word images, "brief but evocative" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 206) expressions of the multiple and changing names embedded in her stories to live by, and placed them alongside her stories of experience.

²¹ The term forename is generally considered to be synonymous with the term first name. In western society the forename precedes the family surname.

Stories of Becoming and Being Breanna

| | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | | I begin, as Breanna did, |
| <i>I'm very reserved</i> | <i>You're American</i> | with her stories of becoming and |
| <i>I am quiet</i> | <i>Quiet</i> | being a member of her adoptive |
| <i>I am an observer</i> | | family and her relationship with |
| <i>I'm too sensitive</i> | | her mother. After receiving life- |
| <i>I'm sensitive</i> | | saving kidney surgery and being |
| <i>I'm sensitive</i> | | |
| <i>I'm sensitive</i> | | |

in foster care in Korea²² for eight months, Soo-Jin arrived in the United States to become the first child of white parents who live in a politically conservative, predominantly white, suburban area outside a medium sized Midwestern city. Upon her arrival and with the bestowal of a new forename she became Breanna Soo-Jin, a member of her new family, and an American.

My parents didn't even say you're Korean. They said, "we adopted you from Korea, but you're American. It's like they really wanted their child to embrace the American identity and to embrace the fact that [I was] now part of this family. (Breanna, research conversation, April 6, 2017)

Breanna believes her parents, particularly her mother, being unable to have biological children, chose international adoption because of social influences.

I feel like it was kind of a trend to adopt babies from Asia at that time, because all her [church] friends were doing it we had two other families who adopted from Korea that were family friends. And we knew another family that was adopting a boy from Russia. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Several years later, Breanna became a sister for the first time.

They adopted me and then they adopted my brother next. He's African American. He's about three and half years younger than me. I kind of feel like, to my parents, I didn't really give them the experience of raising a baby, because I was already eight months old. I was already pretty big. So I feel like

²² Breanna was born in South Korea, but throughout the inquiry she refers to herself as being from Korea.

my mom really got that experience from my brother who was three days old when she got him. So I feel like she has more of a connection to him in that way. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

The disconnectedness Breanna expressed reminded me of feelings of disconnection and tension within my relationship with my mother.

So, I'm sensing there's tension between you and your mom.

There's been a lot of tension, but not about the race thing, more about, I feel like when I was growing up it was more about personality. So she really likes my brother's personality. They get along real well. He's kind of like the complete opposite of me. I would just say, I'm very, always since I was a child I'm very reserved, people would always call me quiet. I am quiet, I don't really speak up. I would just say I don't really prefer to have the attention on me. I prefer to observe. I'm one of those people who likes to observe everything, because I feel like I learn more from observing than talking and filling the air with my voice, but sometimes I would want attention, and I felt like I didn't have the right to, because [my brother] was the one that was supposed to get attention. I just felt like that was how it was. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Even though Breanna discounted the issue of race as a source of tension in her relationship with her mother, she expressed discomfort with her mother's stories around race.

My mom, we have an interesting relationship. She has always favored my brother. He's just the favorite, and it's just kind of hard because after adopting me, an Asian, she's only adopted African American children. I would always notice this when we would go out she would always talk about African American babies when she'd see them she'd say "they're so cute". She'd never really talk about my Asian heritage And she's like "well, I just don't see your culture. I just see you for you. I don't see any race. I see who you are". When I was grown I realized that was kind of a problem statement, because regardless of whether your parent sees your race, you know, the entire society, the entire world sees your race. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Her mother's *I don't see race* narrative fits with the taking of a colorblind ideology, which is "an assimilationist ideology [that] stresses ignoring or minimizing group differences" (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009, p. 444). Expressing this ideology to

people of color is a microinvalidation, a type of microaggression²³, that Sue, et al. (2007) define as “communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (p. 274). I recall a time during which I believed claiming to not notice the color of a person’s skin or other physical features that alluded to social racial categorization was a moral act of inclusion. The dynamic that Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, and Ariely (2006) describe regarding the adoption of a colorblind ideology is consistent with my experience, “In a culture where motivations to avoid appearing prejudiced are increasingly pervasive . . . and few labels are as aversive as that of “racist” . . . colorblindness can serve a useful stratagem: *If I do not notice race, then I cannot be racist*” (p. 949). Perhaps Breanna’s mother felt similarly. But, as Breanna pointed out, this approach is problematic because “the entire world sees your race” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). It is marked by our physical appearance; it is written on our skin. To take on a racially colorblind stance is an attempt to deny the interactive nature of experience (Dewey, 1938/1997). Interactions with others expose us to their views, opinions, beliefs, and values, and our personal worlds become enmeshed with our social worlds. This understanding focused my attention toward coming to a greater understanding of her familial experiences and relationships.

I’d like to go a little deeper into some of your stories about growing up in your family. So if you want to maybe between now and the next time we meet you could either do some journaling or bring some pictures . . . or an item that’s particularly meaningful to you that might help you recall . . . growing up.

So you want it to be a story about my family in particular?

²³ According to Sue et al., (2007), “racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 273).

Well, I am looking for family stories, stories about school, stories about friends.

Okay, so you're starting with family.

That's where I was starting, but if you want to talk about friends or school or just being in the world we can.

Okay. I think family would be the one where I would have to think the hardest 'cause I kind of suppressed a lot of that.

(Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

I was surprised and intrigued by her word choice. Suppressed is a word that I associate with emotional or physical trauma resulting in an act of self-protection. I have engaged in memory suppression when attempting to place painful childhood memories in a space that allowed me to distance myself from their profound impact. The reliving and retelling of those stories was only possible within a trusting, loving relationship and only when I had reached a point at which holding them in caused more pain than releasing them. So, I did not want to pressure Breanna to retell those stories before she was ready. That would have been contrary to functioning within an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) in our relationship. I hoped that as we continued to build our relationship, she would come to trust me enough to move backward into those stories and share them with me. Later in the inquiry, Breanna explained that from a young age she felt “misunderstood, uncomfortable” and that she didn’t have many memories of family that she cared to recall “save a few happy moments” (Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2016).

Breanna chose to bring a variety of family photographs to our second conversation. She spoke briefly about several pictures telling me factual information such as names and places. Hoping to bring forth stories of her familial experiences I asked her to choose one photo to focus on. She chose a picture of herself as a baby, sitting on the kitchen floor in her family’s home.

Tell me about you here. Why did you pick that one?

I guess because I find it interesting, I don't know. I think this was one of the first few weeks that I had come from Korea. I don't know, I think it's interesting. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

I knew I was lacking knowledge of the stories that made this particular image interesting to her. Hoping that she would be willing to move backward into those stories I asked,

If you could talk to you then, what would you say?

I would probably say, this is harsh to say to a child, but just don't be so sensitive about things.

So you must think you are very sensitive

I am, I'm too sensitive. I take things to heart too much. Also, I'm sensitive in the way my environment easily affects me. I'm just very sensitive to everything. I'm sensitive to people's words towards me and their actions towards me. I let a lot of things bother me that I shouldn't have, because it's the world and the world is harsh to you. You gotta learn to grow a thick skin, and I learned that a little later on than I would have liked to.

(Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2017)

Upon reflection, Breanna shared that she chose that picture because “it felt more like looking at a Korean baby in an American household. I was not yet Americanized”

(Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018). Her advice to her younger self was meant as to prepare

this unassuming Korean baby for the life of an American with an Asian face. It is easier to advise myself to attempt toughness than avoid what you cannot change about society: the teasing, the feelings of being different. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

I wondered about Breanna's experiences as she grew older and in other contexts such as inside-of-school and how they interacted with her sensitive nature. It is important for narrative inquirers to “try to understand the stories under or on the edges of stories

lived and told, as no story stands on its own but rather in relation to many others”

(Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 387).

Stories of Preschool and Elementary School (ages 5 – 12)

Breanna’s first experience with school was in a preschool where her mother was one of the teachers. It was in this place where she encountered one of her first experiences of aloneness and separation.

I remember there was a big glass wall between the two classrooms, and I had to be in the other class at first, and I would stare at my mom through the window and pine after her every day. Eventually, they decided to move me into her class because of how pitiful I seemed, I guess. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

She remembers her family as being “quite poor” and told of going to a “pretty poor school” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016) from kindergarten through third grade. During her first day of kindergarten Breanna met a girl with whom she

*I’m not an approaching
type of person*

I’m just a worrier

I was the only Asian

I didn’t know I was Asian

I’m a closed off person

I was stupid

Your face so flat

Your eyes so small

formed her first close friendship. In the

retelling of this story, Breanna labeled

the friendship as “not a good choice”

(Breanna, research conversation,

December 21, 2016).

Either she approached me or I approached her. It would make more sense if she approached me because I’m not an approaching type of person. Either way, we became best friends. Essentially, she became the rule, like the ringleader over me. She took on that role from the beginning of that friendship. I thought that was just friendship. It was my first time making friends. I was reading by the time I was in kindergarten, reading chapter books at fourth grade level. She would always make it a point to treat me like I was stupid. “Oh, Breanna, you don’t know about this. Let me teach you. You don’t know how to spell this word. Let me show you how to spell it.” I wanted to be friends, so I would always play along. I always played along and pretended to be stupid. I don’t know why I did that. I was a kid. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

In elementary school I was pretty frightened and so I suppose that is why I clung to the first friend I met. She was very demanding of my attention, but she was a stability in my school life, and so I clung to her. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

As a child of five, six, seven, eight years old, Breanna made the choice that having this relationship was worth setting aside a part of herself and other friend relationships.

I had a lot of friends, but she never let me hang out with them. I had a really good friend. I hung out with him all recess one day and she didn't talk to me the whole rest of the day. I was so worried, because I'm just a worrier. I was like, "Oh my gosh! She hates me and we're not going to be friends anymore". (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Next to these stories of friends and friendship Breanna told a story of being the only Asian in that school.

I guess in elementary school I got weird questions in that first school. "Why is your face so flat?" "Why are your eyes so small?" I had no clue where they were coming from. I was like, "What do you mean? I don't understand." I just brushed it off. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Her peers, also living in a predominantly white context, may have asked these questions out of curiosity. Perhaps, prior to meeting Breanna, they had never met a person of Asian heritage. It is possible that their parents, like Breanna's parents, had not provided their children with experiences that would have allowed them to acquire social and personal knowledge about people whose racial heritages result in a variety of physical expressions unlike their own. However they may have been expressing racist messages learned at home or from other societal sources such as the media. Either way, Breanna was confused by their questions. I wondered if she sensed that she was being named as someone who is "other", and as a result she took refuge in a relationship with a peer who appeared to greatly value her presence. Breanna agreed that this was likely the situation.

When Breanna was about nine years old, her parents adopted their third child.

After they adopted my brother I feel like they just wanted to keep me and my brother, but we became a foster family. That's how we got my younger sister. She was our last foster child. We had her from when she was three months old. She is also African American. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Breanna expressed love and care for her sister, but the familial narrative around race is present in this story.

It's just kind of hard, because after adopting me, an Asian, she's only adopted African American children. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Breanna's feelings of isolation became palpable to me as her stories of her outside-of-school life and inside-of-school life began to reveal her recognition that the world notices differences. Perhaps when Breanna entered kindergarten she had not realized this, but the actions of her peers, teachers, and parents began to illuminate this reality.

It was actually one of her teachers who revealed to her that she had been adopted from Korea. While in first and second grade she was in a program for high ability and gifted children, and the teacher encouraged her choose Korea for the topic of the required project.

My first memory of being different and learning about my adoption in a way was actually at school. [My teacher] pushed for me to do my project on Korea, I remember they showed me a globe and pointed to Korea and said, this is where you are from, and you came all the way to America, which is here. I was confused. Perhaps I felt the teachers were trying to relate something to me that I did not feel any relation to and I didn't like it, no kid wants to be told they are different, especially if they can't ever relate to it. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

Shortly before Breanna entered the fourth grade improvements in her family's financial situation allowed a move to a different home and elementary school. Though still in the same suburban area, her new school provided a more comfortable and affirming social context.

When I moved to that new elementary school . . . I wish I had started out there because all the people there were so great. They were really actually good people. I didn't meet any bad people. I got no comments, no teasing, no anything, even though I was still the only Asian. Everyone was so nice to me. All the friends I made were amazing.

Why do you think there was such a social environment difference between the two schools?

Maybe it was just luck. My teacher, we did this thing where she was teaching our fourth grade, she moved up to fifth grade the next year, and the entire class moved up with her. It was like we were all family and we all knew each other. She had her parents and they lived in Korea. They had a company in Korea. She would tell me about that, and I didn't care at all. I didn't care about Korea at all. She even gave me souvenirs and stuff. I was like, "I don't care about this". I said thank you, but she was so excited to have me in her class, I think because I was Korean. I didn't feel that connected with Korea at the time. All the people I met were so kind and just open to new experiences.

Can you tell me more about [her]? It sounds like she was central in your life at that school.

She was a great teacher. She was also kind of like an older sister or like a mother to us. She was just so kind, and open, and she fostered a really good environment. She would always make a point to make jokes. She was very easy going. She would ask me questions if she thought I needed help or maybe I wasn't doing okay or something. She never really got angry. She just felt very comfortable. I really liked that.

(Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

In this story fragment Breanna focused on the caring supportive environment and expressed a sense of belonging. Initially she dismissed the importance of her teacher's efforts to make connections with her through her Korean heritage. At the time, Breanna felt no affinity with Korean heritage, however as she looked back at this relationship she came to a new understanding.

I think she did kind of treat me, made sure to particularly treat me nice because she kind of felt like, I didn't realize this at the time, but now I kind of realize maybe, because she would always give me little stickers from Korea and stuff and get excited to give them to me. She was always so nice. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Through her actions this teacher was naming Breanna as Korean. Even though this naming was positive and respectful, Breanna rejected it. She told of how she lacked experiences that might have allowed her to claim that naming as who she was.

Stories of Middle School (ages 12 – 15)

I'm different

*You eat dogs
Your eyes*

I was Asian

I am a different person

I hated myself

I was very quiet

*You look pretty when you
wear makeup*

The entrance into middle

school in the United States

coincides with entering

adolescence. Drawing on Erikson's

(1994) theory of psychosocial

development in human beings,

Tatum (2000) asserts that adolescence is typically a period during which those who grow up in Western societies enter the process of conceptualizing one's identity. This, according to Tatum (2000), is "triggered by the biological changes associated with puberty, the maturation of cognitive abilities, and changing societal expectations" (p. 9). Breanna's entrance into middle school brought her into a social context where she was teased about her Asian heritage and physical characteristics. It was within this time period and social context that Breanna became increasingly self-aware of the complexity and multiplicity of her stories to live by.

I did think of myself as white until middle school and I saw there were Asian people. That's honestly where I realized I was Asian. I didn't know I was Asian until I was frickin' 12. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Breanna didn't have a clear understanding of what it meant to be Asian, but drew upon the social practice of looking to physical markers to identify race.

In the very beginning, I assumed that everyone with black hair was Asian. There was this girl in my orchestra class who had black hair and I felt we

should have a connection. Later I realized she was not Asian at all. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

Tatum (2000) also notes, “how one’s racial identity is experienced will be mediated by other dimensions of oneself” (p.9) such as gender, age, socio-economic status, sexuality, ability or disability, religion, and social context. Breanna’s stories point to social contexts as particularly impactful in her racial identity development. Both inside-of-school and outside-of-school she was living in environments in which she saw few people who looked like her, and those around her either ignored or devalued her Asian heritage.

I got teased for being Asian. I was like, I am this Asian person; I am a different person. And I’ve told my mom this before, I’m like, Mom, I thought I was white until I was like 12. And she was like, no you didn’t, there’s no way you could think you were white, I told you, you were Korean. It was just a word to me. It doesn’t really mean anything until you experience it—you get teased. So, I really hated it. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

From within this story Breanna pulled forth the complexities involved with attempting to live a colorblind philosophy while embedded in a society that instills the concept of race.

My mother elected to take the colorblind approach until I declared myself something that went against what she saw. She then hurried to correct me on my true racial status. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

When Breanna was in elementary school, both her first/second grade gifted education teacher and her fourth/fifth grade classroom teacher offered her an opportunity to enter into her Korean culture; she rejected those offers. As a middle schooler Breanna found it difficult to understand the messages being sent to her by some of her peers. She knew they were teasing her about what they saw to be her differences compared to them. She had not lived a story that would have provided her with the experiential cultural

knowledge to make sense of what her elementary school teachers were offering or what her middle school peers were saying.

When I got teased, that's when I realized there was really something different, I'm actually different, there's something different about me. And I didn't even get the reference. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Several boys repeatedly, and over a period of time, targeted Breanna.

In seventh grade I started to get teased because middle school is a lot different from elementary school. There's a lot more people. Maybe there were a few Asians but not many. I wasn't the popular girl, obviously. A lot of the boys would tease me. There was the one boy; he would tease me every day. He'd be like, "You eat dogs for dinner don't you? Don't you eat dogs for dinner?" every day I had that class for the entire semester. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

The next semester there was another boy. He was the popular boy. He would comment on my eyes and say, "Your eyes, seriously. Open them. Try to open them." He would say that every day. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Eighth grade I got teased again everyday of class for my eyes. And that stuck with me. He teased me about my eyes constantly. He'd just tell me, oh, oh, they're so small, can you even open them and see out of them. I just hated it so much. And I started to realize then that I was so different. I hated myself, and I couldn't see any good things about myself. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

I didn't understand the race part of it until I got teased. So, I was pretty ignorant until I got there, and then I realized I was kind of different. I didn't want to make a big deal of it. I wanted to push it down, and I wanted to fit in. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

These messages of difference separated Breanna from her peers. Coming into this awareness moved her to long for acceptance and belongingness; she wanted to "fit in".

These story fragments remind me of Greene's (1995) notion of seeing big and seeing small. To see a person big is to see her as a human being with "integrity and particularity" (Greene, 1995, p. 10). When we see others as small we see them as objects that are simply part of a larger system. They are seen in generalizable terms divorced

from their value as unique individuals. This is similar to Adichie's (2009) notion of seeing a group of people through the lens of a "single story" (n.p.) that characterizes them as "one thing, and only one thing" (n.p.) reducing them to stereotypes. The boys in Breanna's stories were seeing her small, seeing her as a single story, and they successfully communicated that she was Asian and being Asian was not desirable. Being seen "small", being named as different, being teased and marginalized, brought Breanna to no longer see "Korean" as just a word, it became a story that she hated and wanted to push away. Breanna also lacked experiential knowledge that might have provided her with a positive story around having Asian features and a Korean cultural heritage.

I've talked to a lot of other adoptees from Korea and they say their parents try to get them into their culture; they try to introduce them to some aspects; they take them to Korean adoptee camp or something. I'm like, I've never done any of those. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Reflecting upon Breanna's stories of her inside-of-school and outside-of-school experiences I recalled Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin's (2012) inquiry into the lives of children as they move between their home places and school places, and their understanding "that there are two places of curriculum making: the familial curriculum making in homes and communities and the school curriculum making in classrooms and schools" (p. 46). As Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2012) found in the stories of the children in their inquiry, tensions arose in Breanna as she moved between these two curriculum-making places and as the curriculums bumped against each other. Breanna's middle school was a place where her peers composed a curriculum of difference around her Asian-ness. At home, her parents composed a curriculum of sameness by choosing to be silent about race and culture. This silence brought me to consider Eisner's (1994) conception of the null curriculum in schools. He argues,

what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach . . . because ignorance is not simply a neutral void; it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and perspectives from which one can view a situation or problem. (p. 97)

The silence in her home created a null curriculum that left Breanna unprepared in her dealings with the curriculum composed by her peers.

The teasing was hurtful, but the silence about my actual culture and the positive aspects of it was probably more hurtful, as it created a desire to be someone else, and an isolated, shameful environment for me. I felt ashamed for what I was, because I did not have any positive affirmation about my culture, and I could not create that for myself. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

I wonder if Breanna might have been able to push against the negative stories told by her peers had her parents chosen to compose an explicit curriculum (Eisner, 1994) with positive messages around race and the cultural heritages of their children. Perhaps that would have enabled Breanna to compose positive stories to counter the negative stories others were composing and the names others were giving her.

Lacking positive stories to push against the negative, Breanna drew on a story that told her friends tease each other.

I think maybe I thought, “Oh, they’re just being friends. They’re just teasing me. That’s just what friends do. That’s just what classmates do or acquaintances do”. They’re just having fun is what I thought it was, even though I did get hurt by it on the inside and I felt embarrassed and I kind of wanted them to stop. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Mills and Carwile (2009) explain, “teasing can be playful and fun, and it can be a prosocial strategy of affiliation” (p. 281). Those teasing her may have done so with smiles on their faces, they may have told her they were just joking. They may have attempted to convince her that their actions were friendly, but her emotional response told

her she was experiencing something quite different from that. She was hurt; she wanted them to stop. Mills and Carwile (2009) point out “comments dealing with sensitive subjects are not funny, and have little potential to be playful to the recipient of the comments” (p. 291). Sensitive subjects include “appearance, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and race” (Aronson et al., 2007, p. 174). The teasing Breanna endured focused on three of those sensitive subjects: race, ethnicity, and appearance.

One of Breanna’s teachers came to her defense.

The only way it stopped was I was in the library on the computer. They were walking to the library, they saw me, and they said some comments. There was one of my teachers. She was really pretty. She was a really fierce teacher. She heard them say that. She said, “Hey.” She called them over and said, “You better not be teasing her again. If you do, I’m going to hear about it. You’re going to get in trouble”. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Initially, Breanna bristled at this teacher’s intervention.

I hated the fact that she did that at that time. It was so embarrassing. Maybe it was because she was bringing attention to the fact that it was actually bullying and I didn’t want to see it that way. I just hated it. That actually made them stop teasing. After a period of time I really admired the fact that she did that. She made me feel like I mattered. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

As she brought this story forward she realized that she was faced with the reality that she was not experiencing lighthearted teasing between friends; she was being bullied because her body racially marked her as Asian. By denying the bullying Breanna was denying her Asian-ness; by denying her Asian-ness she was denying the bullying.

Most of my friends were white, and I had a very bad self-image. I didn’t always see other people like me, and I shunned that Asian part. I hated it. I hated being Asian so much. I despised it, and I just wanted to be white. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Her teacher’s actions verified both realities, but by affirming those realities her teacher proclaimed that Breanna “mattered”. To matter to someone else means they see you, hear

you, value you, respect you. The perception that you matter to someone else communicates that you are important, significant, belong, have a role to play, have something to offer. Breanna's telling of this story seems to say that this feeling of mattering to someone else was a rare experience for her. In other words, it seems that it was rare for Breanna to feel that others, as this teacher did, saw her "big" (Greene, 1995).

Breanna's friends group provided some sense of belonging. She attended class with these friends and shared emails about boys and "teenage stuff" (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016). Her best friend during that period of time was a girl she met in elementary school, but their friendship didn't develop until middle school.

I think the reason why we matched so well is because she was also adopted. She was in the foster care system for a long time. She was adopted with her three sisters. She kind of had a traumatic past. It was hard for her. I really admired her a lot. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

It was within this friendship, a relationship that continued through most of Breanna's high school years and to some degree into adulthood, where Breanna began to journal about her experiences and emotions.

We had little friendship journals. It was her idea. We had a lot of friendship journals. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

As Breanna grew older her journals became a safe space for exploring herself, her thoughts, and her emotions, especially during her high school years.

In addition to living in an inside-of-school context where she was subjected to derogatory comments about her Asian heritage, she felt pressured at home to be and become the person she perceived her mother wanted her to be.

She would push me to do things that I didn't want to do. I think she worried 'cause I was very quiet and I didn't necessarily always want to hang out with people. I just liked being introspective and be by myself, and she wanted me to be like the other girls I would see at school who were more popular, girls that

painted their nails and did their makeup. She wanted me to be that child, maybe because she was that child. That's why she pushed me to be in band and play the clarinet. She really wanted me to have the school life that she had I think. She thought, Breanna's in middle school now so she's going to wear makeup. I didn't want to do makeup at all, but she said makeup would make me prettier. She was always concerned with my looks. She would always point out if I had a pimple or something and she would say I needed to take care of it, go cover it up or something, and she got me into makeup when I was twelve. I remember her putting it on me and doing the whole face and she said, "Look, see, look how pretty you are". And that was like the only time she ever told me I was pretty. I really think that she messed up when she said you look pretty now, this is when you look pretty, you look pretty when you wear makeup. You shouldn't teach your kid that. She didn't mean to I think, but I really took it to mean my bare face is so ugly. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

In Breanna's imaginings about her mother's thinking and motivation, she sees her mother drawing upon her own experiences to provide solutions that might lead her daughter toward happiness. In this conceptualization, Breanna's mother is a curriculum maker who chose a particular explicit curriculum (Eisner, 1994), activities and information she identified as holding the possibility of improving Breanna's social status and happiness. I believe the source of Breanna's negative reaction rests in the implicit curriculum (Eisner, 1994) at play. An implicit curriculum is an expression of the cultural environment that "socialize children to a set of expectations that some argue are profoundly more powerful and longer lasting than what is intentionally taught" (Eisner, 1994, p. 88). In combination, the curriculum composed inside-of-school by Breanna's peers and outside-of-school by Breanna's mother implicitly taught her to see herself as different and communicated that she should attempt to erase those differences.

I wondered how and why Breanna's mother, a professional educator and elementary school teacher, might have failed to recognize the implicit curriculum created through the interaction of Breanna's socio-cultural environments. Perhaps she was not accustomed to thinking of curriculum making taking place in the familial context.

Perhaps she thought of curriculum making as the teacher selecting the content for her student based on her own knowledge. If so, Breanna's mother considered only two of Schwab's (1969; 1973) four commonplaces of curriculum—teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu—in her curriculum making process. It may be that the strained relationship between mother and daughter created a barrier that prevented Breanna's mother from taking the learner and her milieu into account. It may also be that, as Breanna pointed out, “sometimes the teacher can also become the learner – I think perhaps my mom forgets this” (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018).

I came to this thinking as I considered my experiences as a teacher. I know that I am more likely to overlook the implicit curriculum when I fail to consider the learner and the milieu in my curriculum making process. I am reminded of Lori, a student of mine whose mother informed me that my teaching was not working for her daughter, and my realization that I did not truly know Lori. I was not forming my instruction around who Lori was and was becoming. I was only considering the institutionally provided curriculum guide (the subject matter) and myself as teacher in my curriculum making, which resulted in implicitly teaching Lori that her “present state of mind and heart” (Schwab, 1973, p. 503) and the milieu of her life were unimportant in my classroom. Although far from my intention, this severely damaged my relationship with Lori. It seems that Breanna's mother and I might have both fallen into the same curriculum-making trap resulting in our learners pulling away from us.

Breanna then looked to her father in hopes of developing a close relationship with one of her parents.

My dad's super, in general he's just a person that likes to joke around a lot. He was always making jokes, or he just didn't want to talk if he was grumpy. I felt

like he favored my brother. I think he really wanted that father-son relationship. I really wanted a relationship with my dad too. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

She saw the relationship her father was working to build with her brother and attempted to model herself and her behavior to match what she perceived to be attractive to him. But she did not feel the close connection she hoped for.

I would try to do everything that he would. He would want my brother to do sports, so I tried to participate too, but I was really little. I wasn't really cut out, I'm not really athletic, but I tried. I tried to like this science fiction show he was really in to. I tried to watch; I was not in to it at all. I don't know if it was because my personality, or just because my dad wanted to pick up more of my brother and really relate to him because he was the son. I think it was more my personality. I was more quiet. He just never really gave me the acknowledgement that I wanted. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

It was within her church community where she found supportive social connections in her outside-of-school contexts.

We did go to church when I was little a lot, but my parents just kind of fell out of that, and they didn't go to church anymore. But I didn't like that. I just wanted to keep going to church 'cause I had friends there. So I literally forced my dad to drive me to church every Sunday. I was the kid. Usually parents are forcing you to go to church. I made my dad get up to drive me to church starting from like sixth grade. I was part of the youth ministry. I did that for like two or three years. It was just me alone, a teenager trying to find rides to church. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

The social context of her church was so important that she stayed connected to it even while the rest of her immediate family was letting it go. It was a place where she felt a sense of belonging and acceptance that she lacked at home and in school. This sense of belongingness may have been tied to the importance that her extended family attached to being Christian and attending church: several family members have been (her paternal grandfather and maternal uncles) or continue to be (her maternal grandfather) church

pastors. Also, Breanna was connected to her church community through her membership in the church choir and youth ministry.

Stories of High School (ages 15 – 18)

I was introspective
I was a loner
invisible
I was alone

An Asian

I had no identity
I had no face
I was stressed
I was ugly
I was depressed
I was shy
I was uncomfortable with myself

Family life continued to be quite difficult during Breanna's high school years, especially within her relationship with her mother. Their interactions often resulted in strong emotions of anger and

sadness for Breanna. To cope with those emotions she turned to writing in her journals. In middle school her journals were communication tools that she and her best friend exchanged to share their thoughts and feelings. As she moved into high school her journals became personal. She spoke about the importance of those journals during our second research conversation.

When I was younger, ever since I was younger I would write so many journals and I have a bunch of journals and, like I said, I was introspective, so when I was younger I would just write it all down. And I think it would be really helpful if I brought those. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

But, as soon as she made this suggestion she hesitated.

I think I, I mean a lot of it, it got to a certain point one of the journals was simply when I was angry and I was angry at my mother. I would write a lot of bad stuff and I don't know if I want to bring . . . (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

I imagine that the idea of placing her journals in my hands and allowing me to read her stories brought forth a need to self-protect. Journals and diaries are, after all,

places where we tell secrets to ourselves; they are usually not intended for the eyes of others. I sensed we were entering a space in which Breanna was negotiating whether she was ready to remember and share some of her suppressed stories of family. She negotiated this tension by devising a compromise.

Or I could just look at it myself and censor. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

At our next research conversation we sat across from each other in a booth at a local restaurant. I asked her to meet me there so I could buy her lunch to express my appreciation for her participation. We had ordered at the counter and were waiting for the waiter to bring our meals. Breanna took her journals out of a bag and held them close to her.

This is the journal. There's a lot of bad stuff about my family . . . I write when I'm angry, or when I'm just sad. I write all of my deep dark feelings in it. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Looking down at the journal and back at me she told me selected stories of her relationship with her mother and the emotions she felt within those experiences.

Essentially a lot of this is about my mom. I said, "Oh she just expects me to be perfect. It makes me hate myself because I'm so lazy and stupid. I can't be what she wants for me. She yells at me all the time. She screams at me. She judges me for everything. She tells me I cook the dinners wrong. Tells me I don't clean the kitchen right." I keep saying, "We're totally different people and she doesn't get that. She keeps acting like she understands me, but she doesn't". She kept telling me that I'm going to be outgoing, brave, fun, and everything she wants me to be, but not who I am. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Again, in the retelling and reliving of her stories she considered her mother's motives.

She just really wanted me to be her. She was really outgoing, fun, and all that stuff in high school. Honestly, I feel like she didn't mean it in a bad way. She just legit thought, "I just want her to be this person because I think she'd have a happier time or better time." (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Breanna believes her mother may have been acting in a manner that she felt would benefit Breanna. But, as with her lesson on wearing makeup, Breanna interpreted her mother's instructional content as negative commentary. The emotional distance in their relationship increased.

I put quotes around mother

As you remember that, writing the word mother and putting quotes around it, what does that express?

It was just me saying, "I don't feel like she is my mother, the way she treats me, and the way we're so different, and the way we can't communicate and the way that she's on me all the time." At this point in my life, I feel like I literally cannot call her mother because she doesn't feel like a mother to me. That was basically what I meant. This was, let's see – I was 15. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Looking back on my experiences raising two daughters I recall that my relationships with them were often filled with tension during their high school years. We frequently disagreed about the best or most appropriate course of action regarding a variety of issues such as fashion, use of technology (cell phones and social media), and social activities. We struggled to see each other's points-of-view and likely had a different vision of how they should live their lives and our hopes and dreams for their futures. I wondered if Breanna's tension in her relationship with her mother were simply part of a normal progression of the mother-daughter relationship. I also wondered, however, if the silence around Breanna's Korean heritage may have compounded those tensions.

Yes, of course I believe it was just a normal part of the teenage years and the mother daughter relationships at that time. However, you also cannot deny the underlying inner turmoil I was facing within myself, and the fact that I needed someone to turn to and my mother could not be that person at the time. And so I felt the biggest sense of loathing and hopelessness around my situation. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

As Breanna looked back at her growing up years, she expressed that family did not provide her with an emotionally safe space; and she judged her familial relationships to be lacking in comparison to those of her friends.

I know family is supposed to be really important. All my friends, you know, like, treat their family as super important, but to me it's never been that, like important to me. But that's really bad, 'cause you know most people really treasure their family. So, I don't know. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Her inside-of-school environment also failed to provide an emotionally safe space.

I didn't feel happy at home. Then I would come to school and I hated it. I just didn't want to come to school because there were just so many students [and teachers] that didn't care about me. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Breanna described her high school as having a similar format as her middle school: lockers, traditional schedule of classes²⁴, and a change of courses each quarter or semester. She rarely had classes with members of her middle school friend group. She and her closest friend from middle school attempted to see each other between classes, but this became difficult and the friendship faded.

Socially high school was . . .

It was awful . . .

I didn't have classes with friends. I was literally a loner, particularly senior year. I think junior year I was a loner. I didn't have any friends. I felt invisible. I don't really know how to describe it.

I would be in the hall, there's these guys coming through the hall and they'd be like, "Oh my gosh, there's an Asian, move." They'd just call me an Asian. That made me feel like I had no identity, like I had no face. They just saw me as an Asian. I just hated being Asian so much. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

²⁴ In the United States a traditional schedule in middle school and high school involves students attended between six and eight different classes of 45 to 55 minutes each day.

Breanna's middle school peers implicitly named her "an Asian" by calling forth derogatory stereotypes about Asian culture and Asian facial features. Her high school peers took a direct approach at this naming. Either they knew her name and chose not to use it, or they made no effort to learn it. Instead they choose to name her by a socially constructed category based on her physical characteristics. As with the boys in middle school, these high school peers were seeing her through the lens of a single story (Adichie, 2009) about what it means to be Asian. In so doing they communicated that, in their eyes, she was not worthy of their effort to know her in her individual human-ness. They, like her middle school peers who teased and bullied her, were seeing her small (Greene, 1995). Similar to the use of the N-word as a name for persons of African American heritage, naming Breanna "an Asian" marked her as "other", as "less than". Those who chose to bully her in this way engaged in microassaults, a type of microaggression.

A microassault is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory action Microassaults are most similar to what has been called "old fashioned" racism conducted on an individual level. They are likely to be conscious and deliberate, although they are generally expressed in limited "private" situations (micro) that allow the perpetrator some degree of anonymity. (Sue, et al., 2007, p. 274)

Breanna felt the insidiousness of microaggressions, having on occasion wished that the comments made toward her in high school were more direct and blatant so that she would have felt justified speaking of her experience.

I remember often times in high school, I would imagine scenarios where someone would call out “CHINK!” to me. This NEVER happened, but, I would WISH that it would happen . . . [so] I could muster up the proper argument for why I was feeling the way I was and to get someone to notice my inner struggles. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

The boys who teased Breanna during her middle school years, on at least one occasion, erroneously judged the library to be a safe space for their microassault upon Breanna. However, Breanna’s stories express that peers intent upon perpetrating microassaults often found the safety of school spaces away from teachers and administrators and amongst peers that either supported their view or were unwilling to express their disagreement. As a result many of Breanna’s peers were directly or indirectly successful at hurting her emotionally and socially.

They were also successful at perpetrated microinvalidations as expressed in Breanna’s description of her feelings as a result of these experiences

I had no identity . . . I had no face. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Breanna’s white American identity, the identity she had been raised with and was all she knew experientially, was negated through their naming of her as “an Asian.” Her peers were imposing an *identity* upon her based on her physical appearance that was dissonant with her experiences.

Originally it [Korean/Asian] doesn’t have to be your identity because that’s not how you grew up, but because people keep putting it onto you, and because of your genetics I have to take this identity. (Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2017)

I am reminded of Boon (2017) who explained being uncomfortable in her own skin in this way:

My skin is a map, its folds, shapes, and contours tracing histories, geographies, stories. But this map tells stories I do not want to hear, plots journeys that I am not ready to take My body is my genealogy, my history, my stories embedded in cells. But that body betrays me. (p. 79)

It seems that the stories Breanna's body was telling did not match the stories she was living, some of which were being composed in the silences around race and ethnicity in her own home.

I am wondering, in your home with your parents who are white and your brother and sister who are African American, are there conversations between anybody about race?

No

None?

None

Between you and your brother?

Me and my brother have had a few conversation about that, and I remember the first time we had a conversation about it was when I was in high school. I was so surprised we felt the same way . . . my parents had the wrong idea, instead of fostering these different multicultural things and being like, "Oh, it's really cool your brother is African American, we can talk about his African American culture and we can learn about your Korean culture". Instead, what my parents did is they just didn't talk about it. They're like, "No, no, you're just my kid. You're not different". They always said, "Oh, we're the same". And then it's not the best.

(Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2017)

I imagine that being named "an Asian" bumped quite forcefully against the silences and apparent colorblind ideology that lived in her home environment. At home her Asian-ness was not affirmed and at school her white/American-ness was not affirmed.

As I reflected upon the tensions that live in the space where these stories of being named and renamed bumped against each other, I was repeatedly drawn to these words of Breanna.

I had no face. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

The expression might simply be the use of an idiomatic device, a repetition of her voicing of her feelings of a lack of identity. Yet, when I lay those words next to Breanna's stories of being introduced to cosmetics in middle school and then turning to the use of makeup quite intensely during high school, those words seem to express an intellectual, emotional, and embodied tension in her life.

I did my make up . . . for like an hour and a half. I spent every morning on makeup. I used to do my makeup because I wanted my eyes to look big. I'm sure people at the time would stare at me. I felt like if I didn't do this make up I couldn't go out. I was ugly if I didn't do this makeup. I wanted my eyes to be big. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

It seems Breanna was attempting to provide herself with a face and identity that she perceived others—both at home and at school—would accept. I suggested that she may have been, quite literally, “putting her face on”²⁵. She agreed, “This is quite literally what I was doing. I felt that if I did this makeup my Asian appearance was hidden, or at least less noticeable” (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018).

Throughout our conversations Breanna often spoke about dealing with “identity issues” or attempting to work through an “identity crisis”.

I was so fed up with being different. I still didn't see myself as Asian. It was so hard for me to see myself as Asian, but other people did, so I realized that. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

²⁵ Putting your face on is an idiomatic expression for applying cosmetics to one's face. It is also an expression that means the taking on of a different identity.

I didn't know who I was. I was like, "What am I doing in the world? Why am I here? I don't even want to exist." I was depressed I guess. Stressed. Depressed.
(Breanna, research conversation, December 21 2016)

Thinking narratively, an identity crisis, or a crisis of stories to live by, would involve a struggle to make sense of multiple and changing stories to live by, because they fail to provide coherent answers to the question "Who am I?" In other words, a state of narrative incoherence exists, because "the elements of life become detached from each other and fail to add up to a whole" (Carr, 1986, pp. 87-88).

The struggle for narrative coherence of a life-story, a struggle that we all face, "is a struggle with two aspects...one to live out or live up to a plan or narrative...the other to construct or choose that narrative" (Carr, 1986, p. 96). Breanna had been, over time, presented with stories to live out or live up to, such as her mother's messages regarding wearing makeup, being in the band, being "outgoing, brave, fun, and everything she wants me to be" (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016). But those stories were not authentic to her; she did not choose them. As Carr (1986) explained, "authenticity is not a matter of this or that social role, or of the fact that it is a social and thus traditionally prescribed role; it consists rather in the recognition that, whatever the role, it is I who choose it in the end, one way or another" (p. 93). The struggle for narrative coherence is born as

a multiplicity of activities and projects, spread out over time and even existing simultaneously in the present, calls for an active reflection that attempts to put the whole together. The most striking occasions for such reflections are those radical conversions, usually religious or political, in which a new view of life, of oneself,

and of one's future projects and prospects requires a break with and reinterpretation of one's past. (Carr, 1986, p. 75)

Reaching back to her experiences in elementary school, middle school, and through high school, Breanna was presented with experiences that called for reflection upon and a radical conversion of her stories to live by around her racial identity. She struggled with the conversion, or re-composition, of these stories to live by and named that struggle a crisis of identity.

In the midst of this struggle Breanna was working 20 to 30 hours a week and taking several advanced placement course each semester. The responsibilities related to these commitments added to her emotional stress level.

When I got to junior year I had a job, I was working 20 to 30 hours and I was taking a bunch of AP classes, I was running myself into the wall. I got a disease on my hands because I was so stressed, probably mentally and physically, I was very stressed.

I spent so much time on [makeup] every day, at least an hour. I would wake up super early, even though I only went to bed at like 2:00 or 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., because I was doing my homework after work.

I'd wake up at 6:00 a.m. to do my makeup. I wasn't getting any sleep. I was trying to keep up with all these AP classes.

I also developed a binge eating disorder. I did that terribly, almost every night. After work I would buy so much food and I would eat it all. It was so bad and so unhealthy. I still kind of struggle with it to this day. It's a lingering thing. I'm obviously a lot healthier now in mindset and that's the most important thing when it comes to an eating disorder. At that time that was my outlet. I didn't have anyone to talk to really. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Perhaps Breanna's quiet, reserved, introspective nature combined with the need to reflect upon the dilemmas that had arisen in her stories to live by caused her to withdraw from her peers and teachers.

At that time I was so internally struggling. I was so shy, like painfully shy. A lot of the classes you have to do speeches and make presentations. I feel like my teachers didn't really like me that much because my teachers all really like the outgoing kids who were popular and were really good at giving the speeches because they were just so confident. Of course, popular people get all the attention from the teachers. Me, I'm more quiet, especially then. I was so uncomfortable with myself.

I didn't really reach out because I didn't feel comfortable reaching out. It just felt like I didn't want to be in the eye of anyone. I didn't want anyone to look at me. I didn't want to draw attention to myself.

(Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Breanna seems to be describing a relationship chasm between herself and her teachers.

Even though they were “pretty nice” (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016) people, she saw herself as someone who didn't fit the student profile her teachers valued.

Most people and teachers really respond to people that are more outspoken. I was not that outspoken person. I felt from some teachers, they did care about me, they noticed me a little bit, 'cause I was always there. But they didn't really know how to talk to me, or do with me or handle me, because I was just very quiet. They probably thought, oh, it's just best to leave her. (Breanna, research conversation, March 2, 2017)

Breanna came to believe that her teachers didn't know how to connect with her, how to reach out to her, how to include her in the activities of the classroom. Reaching back to my experiences as a classroom teacher I believe Breanna may be correct. I recall times I struggled to connect with students. In those situations it felt as if there was a wall between us. My attempts to break through that barrier were often rebuffed. I suspect some of my students, like Breanna with her teachers, felt a contradictory push and pull in their relationship with me.

At the time I was okay with it, because I don't like the spotlight on me, but that doesn't mean I didn't want attention from them. It's just in that setting I didn't feel quite comfortable with attention. So that's why I was okay with not getting it. (Breanna, research conversation, March 2, 2017)

I wonder if Breanna's complex feelings of wanting attention yet shying away from it were connected with her social and personal struggle with being physically Asian but experientially white. Though she wanted attention from her teachers she likely knew that would also bring the attention of her peers. She knew that when her peers looked at her they saw her as Asian and some named her "an Asian" often in ways that demeaned her. Knowing that others saw her differently than she saw herself brought her great confusion and emotional pain. She attempted to resolve this situation by changing her physical appearance through the application of cosmetics in an effort to look more white, to blend in and fit in socially. I also wonder if she was attempting to modify the map created by her skin (Boon, 2017) such that the stories told by her skin matched the stories told by her lived experiences.

This led Breanna to online tutorials to learn how to apply makeup in a manner that would achieve her goal. Ironically, through this search she discovered a part of Korean culture that captivated her attention and began to change her view of herself as a person of Korean heritage.

Obviously, I had an interest in makeup, so I watched a lot of the beauty YouTubers and makeup tutorials. And so, there was this one Chinese girl and she would just randomly talk about watching this Korean drama. The word Korea stood out to me, 'cause, obviously I knew I was from Korea. I was, that's kind of interesting. I'm just going to click on the link. So I clicked on the link and looked at the poster from the drama. And that looks cool, 'cause it was kind of fantasy, and I really like fantasy. And that's how I got in to it.

So, they were speaking Korean and you didn't at the time.

It was all subtitles. It was like a completely new world for me, but for some reason I got caught in it. I really found it interesting, 'cause those people looked like me.

So, you were in your room on YouTube watching Korean television.

Yup, literally, I would have a different tab up if my mom or someone came, and I didn't want anyone else to know.

Why did you want to keep that secret?

I didn't want to explain it to her, because I felt like I would somehow get in trouble for having an interest, or she wouldn't understand, she would think I was weird. It was subtitled, and obviously, even to my ears it was a foreign language. It sounded interesting to me. I was just afraid she would judge me. I just wanted it to be my own thing. I didn't want anyone else to see it, make comments on it, make me feel terrible about this thing I really liked. I thought a lot of people would judge it, and I really enjoyed it.

(Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

In the viewing of Korean dramas, Breanna finally saw herself in her own skin; she saw people who look like her. And, for the first time, Breanna was exposed to an element of Korean culture, the Korean language, in a manner that resulted in a positive reaction on her part. However, she feared others in her family would not react similarly. Perhaps the silence in her home around the concept of race and cultural diversity caused this fear. Perhaps she felt there was no room for the celebration of her Korean heritage within that silence.

I wish my mother would have called me beautiful. I wish she would have brought attention to the beauty in me, and not the flaws. I wish she would have pointed out the beautiful shape of my eyes, or how pretty the color of my hair was. Or simply how I was a beautiful person on the inside that perhaps my peers simply did not understand yet, but that she knew to be true. These words, even spoken just one time, would have resonated within in me forever and sparked hope and acceptance within me. My mother wanted to help me, but she thought the way to do so was to fix what was "wrong" with me. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

Stories of College (age 18 – 22)

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>I look Asian</i> | Breanna's growing interest |
| <i>I couldn't be Asian enough</i> | in Korean dramas, music, and |
| <i>I wasn't good enough</i> | |
| <i>I was pretty much ignorant</i> | culture began to bump against her |
| <i>A white last name</i> | |
| | <i>A white last name</i> desire to shun her Korean heritage. |
| <i>I was being fake</i> | |
| <i>I look the part</i> | This place of bumping and her |

movement from high school to college opened a new space of discovery.

I discovered that I wanted to learn the language. My mom really wanted me to go to MWU. I was kind of against it. I wanted to escape and go out of state, which is expensive. So that's why she wanted me to go to MWU. And the thing that really made me be, okay fine, I'll go to MWU, was I researched it and they had a Korean class and there's not many colleges that teach Korean. I think that's how much I was just really trying to learn about Korea. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

Hutchinson (2017) pointed out,

many in our society story university as a place of transition and freedom away from parents and before the responsibilities of adulthood; they see it as a place of experimentation and self-exploration unavailable in childhood homes, among the communities and families with whom and through whom we have composed our identities over a lifetime. (p. 69)

Breanna explained that college did, indeed, become a place where she felt free from the stories others had composed about her identity.

It's a lot different now because I don't live with her. She can't really control me as much as she tried to. I'm going to do what I want and be who I want to be. I don't have to listen because I don't live under her roof. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

For adoptees, when they start to explore their ethnicity that usually happens when they reach the higher education in level . . . that happens a lot of times, because you're not with your white family any more, so you lose that tie, you

move on. You go live in a college town, and college towns are surrounded by diversity usually. It's a bigger environment. The colleagues in my class, one of them is gay, and he's like, "Yeah, I totally agree with you. I discovered a lot more about myself coming to the college environment". (Breanna, research conversation, March 2, 2017)

Breanna came to understand the importance of shifting contexts in the composition of a life and particularly her life. Her shift from home to college provided a space where she could enter into the work of composing stories to live by around her Korean/Asian heritage.

I have devoted my whole college life to trying and trying to get in [to the Asian culture] to learn about those things and to just fit in entirely, and know the culture. I just really have an interest. I really think it's interesting to know where you came from. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

People around her in this new context communicated that they storied her as a person who represented valued knowledge and history. Her Korean features and heritage no longer marked her an outsider.

[In] Korean class everyone has an interest in that culture, they're all trying to learn. And so, they all loved me, they're like, you're Korean. That was the first time I felt like being Korean is something good, something to be proud of. That helped me accept my Asian side a little bit more. But at the same time, I only resemble them on the outside. I had no idea . . . even though everyone assumed I did because I looked Asian. I literally faked my way through. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

For the first time she felt that being named Korean or Asian was a positive experience. Although she had come to the decision that she wanted to choose that role, she lacked the experiential knowledge that would have allowed this new story to feel narratively coherent (Carr, 1986). Similar feelings erupted in her social interactions with other Asian students, such as within the Asian American Student Union during her freshman and sophomore years.

Her new desires to be and become Asian, to fit in with her Asian peers, bumped against her white stories to live by and her last name as a public expression of those stories. Wanting to be Asian, she chose to conceal her white/American last name to ward off questions that might arise when her new peers realized a mismatch between her name and her physical features.

I was being fake; I was trying to pretend to be Asian. Now, I just tell people I'm adopted because it's a fact. But then, I was trying so hard. I was finally fitting in with these Asian people. I didn't relate to them really, at all, but I was finally fitting in at least on the outside and that's just what you want when you're young. So I was going to try really hard to fit in with Asians, because it's so much easier for me to fit in with Asians, because I already look the part.
(Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

During Breanna's freshman year she met Lisa while they were enrolled in the same Korean language class. Initially, Breanna did not feel a connection with Lisa, however during Breanna's junior year Lisa encouraged Breanna to join her in a four-month study abroad experience in Seoul, South Korea. It was during that time that they developed a close relationship; coming to know their similarities in personalities and past experiences drew them together.

We understand each other on a deeper meaning, because she is half Korean half white. I really relate a lot to half Korean half white people, but especially her because our personalities are really similar. We are both really introspective, we're both sensitive. She's a psych major. She really likes to talk to people. She's really introspective. I like to talk to people one-on-one like this. I don't like to talk in groups.

She looks kind of more white. She had sort of the same feelings as me, of trying to fit in. She has the opposite problem of me. She has a Korean heritage. She grew up Korean. She has a Korean mother. She knows way more about Korea than I do, about the food, the culture. She can do a perfect Korean accent that I cannot do.

(Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

I look like a normal Korean

I actually was just another Korean

I fit in

I was pretty

While in Seoul, Breanna was

once again categorized based upon her

physical appearance. In this context, as

in the Asian American Student Union, the categorization positioned her as an insider.

When I would go out I'd just look like a normal Korean person. I was just like a normal person. Inside I felt a disconnect. I was like, "Oh, this is still so new to me." I actually was just another Korean. My friends would get a little bit different treatment. They'd move out of their way or they'd try to use English with them. With me, it was all Korean. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Even though she lacked experience with the Korean culture and the Korean language, people around her looked upon her as someone like them. This ease of fitting in stands in contrast to how she feels most of the time while in the United States.

I feel a huge disconnect here in a way that I didn't feel in Korea. Korea was amazing partly because I fit in and everyone was so nice to me. They would tell me I was pretty. Here, a lot of people kind of ignore me. Maybe they think, "Oh, she doesn't know English or she's foreign It still feels annoying to not fully be accepted by the culture you grew up in. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

In Korea, Breanna's physical appearance was not only seen as normal, but beautiful. I imagine she felt a sense of relief that there was no pressure to change her physical appearance to be accepted. These story fragments also seem to show a sense of belonging stemming from her ability to blend in to the social context.

My experience in Korea was the most perfect thing that I have ever experienced. I felt completely comfortable. Overall, I loved every part. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

Although Breanna entered MWU primarily due to her desire to learn to speak Korean, before her study abroad experience Breanna's intended major course of study was business. Her experiences in Korea impacted her so profoundly that upon her return

to MWU she changed her major to Global International Studies and East Asian Language. Her time in Korea also opened the door for her to make contact with her birth father, an experience that allowed her to restory herself.

I was originally going to try and find him when I was in Korea studying abroad, and I just didn't get around to doing it. I regret it now; I could have met him. I met another Korean adoptee who was doing the same thing while I was in Korea, and I was like, I should do that too, but then I didn't do it . . . I got back from Korea and I sent all the forms to this social worker I found . . . Then, this January I got word back from my dad. We started sending each other letters through email through the social worker. We did that for two letters and then my dad told me we don't need to go through the social worker anymore because my Korean is really good, that we're just able to talk just to each other We've been doing that ever since, and it's been awesome.
(Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

I wondered if her parents had supported her in this effort.

Do your mom and dad know that you're communicating with your birth dad?

Yay, they do.

And what do they think about that?

I don't know. My grandparents actually were the main reason I thought, oh, this is a good thing, like my grandma especially. I had talked to her one time, and she's the one that really said this is a great thing, this is so good, you should really do this. She's the one that really encouraged me. Like I said, my mom's really closed off with me, and my dad and I don't really have a good relationship. So when I tell them about these things, especially my mom she just kind of seems distant and disinterested. I know a part of her is probably like, I don't want her to find this other family, I feel like she's trying to replace me. I'm sure she feels like that at some level, but at the same time it's hard because she acts so disinterested and doesn't want to say anything. She doesn't want to talk.

(Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

The distance in her relationship with her mother moved Breanna to reach out to her grandmother for advice and support as she considered the possibility of contacting her birth father. She also looked to her own experiences in relation to her ability to forge a relationship with him.

It would have been so difficult for me to reach out to my father if I had not been immersed in the Korean culture. I wouldn't know how to communicate with him at all. So the fact that I got immersed in this Korean culture and I was able to learn the language, it opened up this opportunity for me. I could actually have a relationship with my dad if I wanted to. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

I also think it was . . . I feel very alone and I feel like a lot of people don't understand me that much. I feel like I can't communicate with my actual family here. Not that I think they don't love me. Not that I think they don't care about me. I just wanted to be able to contact someone who understood me, who even looked like me. It was just a combination of those things. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

These story fragments brought the temporality and sociality of her experiences to the fore in my thinking. Her past, present, and future were evident as I recalled her story of discovering Korean dramas on YouTube that moved her toward her Korean heritage and the Korean language, which prepared her to enter into a relationship with her birth father. She was also hoping to create a unique personal bond with her birth father, a bond she felt could not exist with her adoptive family.

*Alone
I was adopted
I was expensive*

Coming into relationship with her birth father brought an adoption story that bumped against the smooth and simple story she had been told.

What I was told is I was adopted because of my kidney. I had a problem with my kidney and they did surgery in Korea and then I was in a foster home until I finally got adopted. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

Her birth father confirmed she was, indeed, quite ill and in need of life-saving surgery at the time of her birth. It was his understanding of the circumstances surrounding that surgery and the progression of events leading to her adoption that added complexities to the story.

He just sent me a letter two weeks ago explaining what happened from his perspective when I was adopted. When I was born they [hospital personnel]

went to my dad, and in Korea it's kind of hierarchical so the male has the decision, so they went to my dad, didn't talk to my mom or anything, and said your child is very sick, her best chance of surviving is to send her to a more developed country, like America, So he said he had a really hard decision to make and he just signed the papers to send me off to get the care I needed. But I actually got surgery in Korea, and then I was in foster care. They didn't send me to America. All they had to do was take out my kidney and I was fine.
(Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

When Breanna shared her adoption story with him he told her that he felt he and his wife had been deceived. Breanna realized she lacked a complete story about the conditions that led to her adoption. Her attempts to understand led her to a story that reached beyond her personal experience.

I've been doing some research on this, even in the 1990s Korea was struggling, the economy was struggling, they were struggling. They felt like they weren't developed enough, and one of their biggest exports was babies. Korean adoption agencies and hospitals kind of worked together to find any way they could to get babies to send to America. Because I was expensive, you know it's really expensive to adopt a child, especially internationally. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

Hearing this story I was struck by the silent stories that surround Breanna's adoption. Her adoptive parents created a silence around her racial heritage. She was also part of a larger silence created during her first day of life by people she has never known. I wondered how coming into this silence impacted her view of Korea.

You're coming to the judgment that there was some sort of subterfuge involved in what happened with you when you were born. Does that impact your view of Korean culture, Korea as a country?

It doesn't because I've already been learning a lot about Korean history. I know that Korea was colonized by Japan. Japan did some really terrible things to them until they were freed in 1945. Essentially Japan tried to eradicate their culture and eradicate the Korean language. It was very traumatizing for Koreans. They had to make sacrifices to get to where they are now. I learned about the adopting thing where Korea exported a lot of babies. They did whatever they could to get the babies. I don't really blame Korea, but it is kind of disheartening that I was a part of that. I don't really have any hard feelings.
(Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

As I listened to her response I was amazed by her magnanimity. For much of her life she had looked upon her Korean-ness negatively, and had she come to know this information while holding that view she may have had a much different reaction. I wonder if her positive experiences with her Korean heritage and culture provided her with the ability to take in this new story and be understanding of the people who composed it. Her reaction seems to illustrate a new and growing understanding of the complexities involved with being a Korean adoptee. For example, Breanna understands that her parents paid a significant sum of money to adopt her from Korea. It is important, I believe, to note that this made them complicit in the composition of this morally questionable adoption process, but Breanna recognizes,

my parents didn't do anything wrong. They just adopted me. (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016)

She also sees that her adoption was much different than those of her siblings who were adopted through the social services agencies with presumably much less financial cost to their parents. Breanna told of her mother speaking of her adoption being expensive, but not about the cost of her siblings' adoption. The silence seems to imply a difference. Her adoption stands apart from that of her siblings.

Being adopted also sets her apart from the dominant narratives of families as parents raising biological children. Breanna told a story of meeting a person at a social event who was quite interested in her Korean heritage, but Breanna sensed a discomfort when this person learned she was adopted.

She did not quite seem to know how to respond to the information. She didn't really comment on it. Adoption already has a lingering stigma on it honestly; a sort of taboo, "we should not speak of this" type of thing, and combine that with

an interracial adoption, and for some people it is awkward and difficult to talk about. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

The complex stories of her adoption brought forth many wonderings on her part, and as she entered her final semester of her senior year, about three months after she and I entered this inquiry, Breanna entered into an exploration of the complexities of being a Korean adoptee through her capstone project²⁶ for her degree program. She chose to inquire into the experiences of two Korean adoptees through semi-structured interviews. She was particularly interested in their stories of identity development, and wondered if their experiences were similar to her own.

It was really cool to see . . . I only did two people. I wish I knew more people so I could have even more people to interview, because each person is so different, and yet there's those similar threads that run through each of their stories that are connections and you're just like, "Yes?" Then they connect back to your lit review, but also, at the same time they get to those points of different ways with different situations and it's so interesting to hear each person's individual story. Then I compare it personally to my own story, which is really cool. (Breanna, research conversation, April 6, 2017)

As we spoke about her research findings a reshaping of her understanding of her stories to live by as a person with multiple racial heritages emerged.

You know what is really cool? The first person I interviewed I asked him, "How do you identify now?" And he said, or like "How would you have identified through the years?" And he said, "When I was younger, I was just white. But now, I would say there's almost like this third level." And I was like "Yes! A third level! That's exactly what I wrote about in my literature review." He's like, "A third level where I've discovered I can be both." I think that's also important going back to the family environment. People just think very linearly.

Yes, or binary, like you're this or that.

²⁶ A capstone project is "a multifaceted assignment that serves as a culminating academic and intellectual experience for students, typically...at the end of an academic program.... Capstone projects are generally designed to encourage students to think critically, solve challenging problems, and develop skills such as oral communication, public speaking, research skills, media literacy, teamwork, planning, self-sufficiency, or goal setting" (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

Yeah, that's what I'm trying to say. And so the parent is like, "Well if she's going to be Korean or American, obviously she's gonna be American." . . . I think a lot of adoptees feel so much better when they finally realize that they can be both.

Which becomes that third level . . . I'm this, I'm this, and I'm both.

Yeah, and I was like, "That's perfect." He's like, "It's like I'm a day walker."

Like what you were talking about switching, he called it day walking?

He did, Yeah.

Like, today I'm walking in this identity because of what I'm doing and who I'm with, but some other times I might be walking in this other identity, which you called it "switching"?

Yeah

(Breanna, research conversation, April 6, 2017)

*I literally have two identities
in two languages
I'm constantly switching*

I was recalling a previous conversation
during which Breanna spoke of "switching in and
out of identities" (Breanna, research conversation,

March 16, 2017) as she told the story of integrating a Korean identity into her stories to live by around race.

At first I was still very American and I was learning about Korean, and so I was trying to fit into Korean, but as I have learned more and more about Korean I've actually taken on Korean as part of my identity . . . with my already identity of being white or being American. So, because I actually have literally two identities in two languages . . . if you're speaking a certain language your personality does change a little when you're speaking that or you're speaking this. I just feel like I'm constantly switching in and out of those identities and it's hard to find a melding of it. It's more like I'm just being this identity and then I'm switching to this one. I'm being really American and then I'm being really Korean. It's a switching and I'm always wondering, "Why am I switching"? . . . I also see in other people that maybe they prefer this identity for me, and then I switch to that one. Then with other people, I feel like this side of me would fit more with Koreans, so I try to switch to that one. (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Breanna's description of "shifting" and I imagine her participant's experience of being a "day walker" is quite like Lugones's (1987) conception of "world"-travelling as described here:

The shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call "travel". This shift may not be willful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different than one is in a different "world," and may not recognize that one is in a different "world". Even though the shift can be done willfully, it is not a matter of acting. One does not pose as someone else, one does not pretend to be, for example, someone of a different personality or character or someone who uses space or language differently than the other person. Rather one is someone who has that personality or character or uses space and language in that particular way. The 'one' here does not refer to some underlying "I". One does not *experience* an underlying "I". (pp. 11-12)

Breanna's story and Lugones's words helped me understand that when a person finds it necessary to "world" –travel, and they shift who they are when in different worlds, the person does not experience an unchanging underlying identity and simply behave differently in different worlds. The "world"- traveller actually *is* a different person in different worlds. As Lugones (1987) explained when she has travelled between worlds, "I am a plurality of selves" (p. 14).

Perhaps Breanna has come to this understanding by not only laying her own experiences next to those of her study participants, but also by integrating knowledge she gained through her academic program.

We had a speaker in one of my classes yesterday. The entire time she was talking she focused on this aspect of identity. She was like, "Identity is fluid. It

is not one thing. It can be multiple things. There are multiple cultures within a person, you can have multiplicities.”. I was like, “Yes, that is so true!” Your relationship to social categories can become quite ambiguous, because social categories are very rigid. A lot of times you have multiple identities. You’re in this one, and you’re in this one, and, just straddling. (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Additionally, her capstone project moved her to see that even in the face of strong social stories she could compose her own stories to live by in relation with her multiple contexts.

No matter what, the adoptee’s relation to identity is constantly reaffirmed or denied by society, because people still think categorically. You may come to terms with this identity within you, but your identity is not just your perspective. It is also in relation to society and how you fit in. I decided I’m going to be both. It’s hard to accept or understand that you relate to both categories, especially if you look a certain way. (Breanna, research conversation, March 2, 2017)

When I started doing this project is when I actually really did accept the two-identity thing and not the I gotta pick one. So when I started this project and I did research, it made me realize it’s okay to be both, and that’s what I’m going to identify as from now on. I really honestly identify as both. (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

I’m going to be both

In Breanna’s words, “I decided I’m going to be both”

(Breanna, research conversation, March 2, 2017), I saw her claiming her right to compose her own stories to live by, to be as Heilbrun (1988) writes the author of her own stories, recognizing as Greene (1995) suggests that she is always composing her stories in relation. She is not simply accepting a racial identity given to her by others. She is no longer willing to accept a binary story of race that has thwarted her attempts to answer the question “Who am I?” She has recognized the multiplicity and complexity of her stories to live by around race, and begun “to compose new stories that are capable of accommodating both new experiences and experiences of the past” (Hutchinson, 2017, p. 167)

I think I was firmly white through middle school, and then in high school I discovered [Korean dramas], but it was a secret . . . it was not legitimized in my eyes. When I came to college, that's when I didn't want to be white because I had never really been accepted from a certain point. I just kept seeing discrepancies and people just kept teasing me, and I was just over that, but still on the inside in those formative years in college, like freshman and sophomore year, I still identified as white and not really as Korean. It was just sort of a thing I was learning about, and I wanted, but I didn't identify as Korean at all. So, I identified as white, but I put on the façade of trying to be Korean, but it wasn't who I was on the inside. I was a little bit depressed. I was like, "Oh, what am I?" There were some times when it was really difficult to put on that façade, because I was also blindly feeling out, "How do I be Korean?" How do I put this façade on?" I kept thinking if I just keep trying, I keep learning about it and keep putting on the face, it's just going to become me maybe, but I still identified as white. And now that I've finally learned, and I've even muttered to myself in Korean sometimes, so now I can finally say I'm both to some extent, but I don't think there was ever a time where I personally identified as Korean and not white, even though I wanted that. (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

The Warp and Weft of Breanna's Stories to Live By

Figure 3. Breanna's Graphic Annal

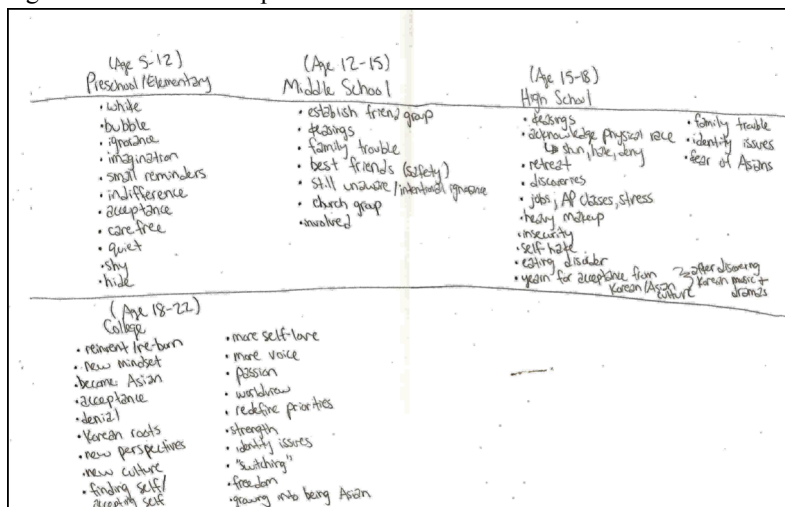


Figure 3. Breanna's graphic representation of significant events, memories, and experiences in her life

During our third research conversation I asked Breanna to create an annal, a kind of graphic representation of significant events, memories, and experiences in her life.

I explained that it could

be a timeline, but it could take whatever form she felt most appropriate. I hoped that this would aid in our efforts to enter into her stories of experience. Her busy work and school

schedules made this difficult, so I offered to set aside time during one of our research conversations. She created this graphic (see Figure 3) during our fifth conversation.

I came to our sixth conversation with my reflections, as I had thought about her annal alongside her stories of experience.

So, I want to tell you what this brought to mind for me and get your reactions, get your thoughts. Am I—

On point?

Yes, on point. When I looked at this, it's groups of words organized by age, by schooling: elementary, middle school, high school, college...

Like periods of life

(Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

Breanna's annal expressed the importance of the temporal progression—her periods of life—in the composition of her stories of experience and stories to live by. The form of the annal—lists of words—brought my attention to her use of, and connections with, language. By the time she created this annal she had told me several stories about her practice of journaling as a form of self-expression. I was also aware that Breanna had chosen to attend MWU because of the availability of Korean language courses.

I am wondering if I'm hearing correctly that you are very connected to and are shaped by language?

Yes, yes, it's huge. I think it was always important to me, but I realized that importance of language as I got older and how crucial it is for me.

It's not just that language is necessary in our world, it's that language is part of your identity as a human being, an element of who you are.

Yes! Wow! That's a really good insight.

(Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

I came to see Breanna's word lists as word images—"brief but evocative" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 206)—expressions of the personal and social aspects of her experiences through

time and across contexts. In addition, words such as white, indifference, acceptance, unaware, intentional ignorance, physical race, discoveries, self-hate, identity issues drew me to her self-proclaimed identity crisis (Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2017).

I'm seeing this as connected to what you are naming as an identity crisis. As I follow your word images from stage to stage, temporally through your life, I'm seeing your progression towards coming into and recognizing this identity crisis, but also moving through and at some point seeing a future where that identity crisis is, if not resolved, at least dealt with.

Yes!!

(Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017)

As we moved through this narrative inquiry I came to understand that Breanna's efforts to resolve her identity crisis, work to understand her racial identity, and choosing how to name herself has been and continues to be a strong focus of her life energy. Breanna's struggle seems to live in the space where naming and identity intersect. This thread is woven through her stories of experience, and I began to view it metaphorically as a personal and social weft moving through the temporal and contextual warp of her life.²⁷ I came to see that although other threads, such as physical appearance, family relationships, the influences of friends and peers, and personality differences, emerged in her stories of experience this weft thread was always there.

As I had hoped, her graphic annal provided insights into her stories of experience and how those experiences fit together, follow from each other, and bump against each other. It is for this reason that I chose to organize this narrative account around Breanna's periods of life.

²⁷ In the creation of fabric, strands or fibers are spun, or twisted, into long threads. Threads are then woven together on a loom with the warp threads running lengthwise and the weft thread, or threads, being drawn back and forth, over and under the warp.

In the preschool/elementary school section of her annal (see Figure 4), Breanna named herself quiet, shy, and imaginative. She connected these names to her sensitive nature.

Figure 4. Breanna's Preschool/Elementary School Graphic Annal

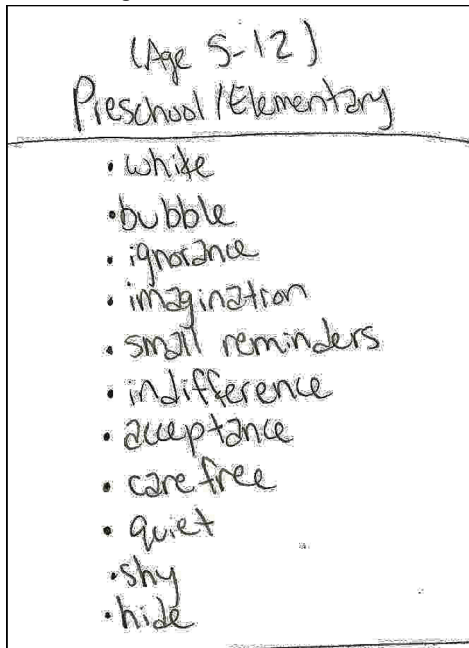


Figure 4. Section of Breanna's annal focusing on significant events, memories, and experiences during her preschool and elementary school years

I'm sensitive to the environment, to people's words towards me and their actions towards me. I'm more of a closed off person, this was always me. I find the smallest little nook I can and I curl up there, I just sit there. I'll have a book, or I'll imagine something. I always loved to find those little nooks. (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016)

Perhaps Breanna sought out those nooks to create a bubble of protection, but her social contexts also placed her within a bubble. She was unaware—ignorant—of society's conception of race even though she experienced small indications of the existence of the concept from members of her inside-of-school world through her peers' questions about her physical

appearance. Her teachers' attempts to connect with and show acceptance of her Korean heritage also served as evidence of her race, but Breanna politely refused the offerings. Even within a colorblind narrative in her home, the actions of her mother—her attraction to African American children—alluded to race. In this combined social context Breanna named herself as white, the racial identity that her familial and school experiences and contexts presented to her.

The language Breanna used in the middle school section of her annal (see Figure 5) reflects the beginnings of her realization that she was different from many of her peers. The teasing and bullying that she endured labeled her that way. She glimpsed her Asian-ness but intentionally chose to ignore it, turn away from it, and shun it. She wanted to

Figure 5. Breanna's Middle School Graphic Annal

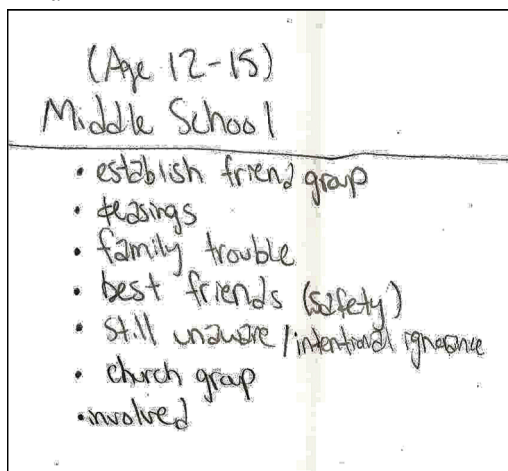


Figure 5. Section of Breanna's annal focusing on significant events, memories, and experiences during her on her middle school years

She found safety and acceptance within her small group of friends and in her involvement with her church youth group, but she often felt a lack of belonging and acceptance both at home and at school.

Breanna's annal of her high school years (see Figure 6) encapsulated her feelings of aloneness that continued to grow as personal and social factors collided within

continue to name herself as white in order to fit in with her friends and her broader social environment.

Middle school is where I realized that my physical being was different, and I realized that that mattered to some people. But all through middle school I purposefully put that aside, and I didn't think about it because I didn't want to think about it. I just ignored the teasing, and I didn't really connect the teasing with the racial identity, because I didn't want to focus on it at all. I probably had identity issues, but I didn't face them until high school. (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016)

Figure 6. Breanna's High School Graphic Annal

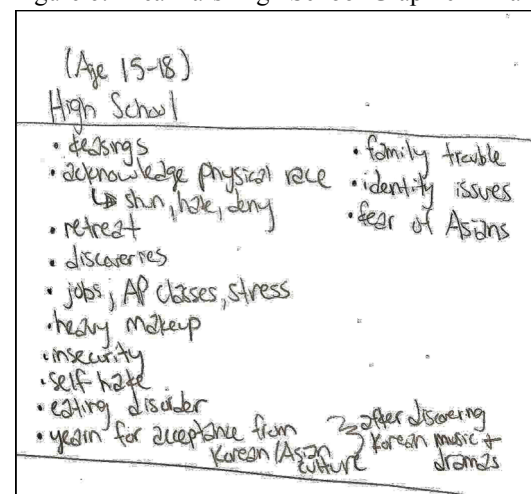


Figure 6. Section of Breanna's annal focusing on significant events, memories, and experiences during her high school years

and between her inside-of-school and outside-of-school contexts. She was bullied by her

peers and felt isolated from her friends and her teachers. Being named “an Asian”, an experience that pulled forth past experiences of being questioned, teased, and bullied about her Asian heritage and physical characteristics during elementary and middle school, resulted in her self-acknowledgement of her physical race. Her family’s position that race didn’t matter combined with personality conflicts between herself and family members, particularly her mother, brought forth sadness, anger, insecurity, and self-hate. As she did when she was younger she retreated from others, but rather than finding a small physical space of safety she covered her face with makeup and filled her days with the responsibilities that came with advanced placement classes and employment. Her insecurities about being Asian caused her to isolate herself from others including those who looked like her; none of the stories she told of high school experiences involve relationships with peers of Asian heritage. The stresses and tensions she felt as she attempted to negotiate these complexities manifested in mental health challenges including an eating disorder. The tensions and negative feelings she held within her around her racial identity bumped forcefully against feelings of enjoyment and curiosity when she discovered Korean dramas and music through YouTube. With this discovery she began to crave knowledge about her Korean heritage and Korean culture. This became the backdrop for her entrance into the next period of her life—college.

The section of Breanna’s annal that focuses on her college years (see Figure 7) reflects her movement toward claiming and enacting agency over her self-naming and the composition of her stories to live by. As I have discussed previously, the university context provided her with an environment in which she felt a sense of freedom that allowed her to move in that direction. She was presented with the opportunity to set aside

Figure 7. Breanna's College Graphic Annal

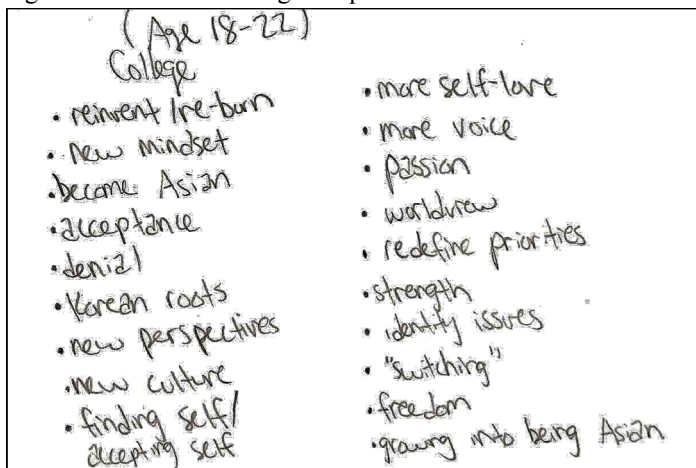


Figure 7. Section of Breanna's annal focusing significant memories, events, and experiences during on her college years

the found communities (Lindemann Nelson, 1995; 2001) that she was adopted into—her family, her schools, and her Midwestern, suburban community—and was able to enter into communities of her choosing, such as the Asian American Student Union and the classroom communities within her major field of studies. Within these chosen communities (Lindemann Nelson, 1995; 2001) she began to negotiate a counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995; 2001) of identity to challenge the oppressive stories of racial and personal identity that she was accustomed to hearing and living. She characterized her efforts to compose this counterstory as a

warring of two identities. Up through high school, it was a suppression of the Asian identity. Once I got validation and attempted to try to fit in with Asian culture, this started an actual clash of the two, which I had to navigate my way through. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 18, 2018)

The composition of this counterstory, a story in which she proclaimed that she named herself as both white and Asian, seems to have moved her toward creating a sense of narrative coherence around her stories to live by through “active reflection that attempts to put the whole together” (Carr, 1986, p. 75). As Rudd (2007) explains,

to have a sense of my life as a whole is to have a sense of who I am. To think of who I am in *narrative terms* is to think of myself as a temporal being and so as a being with a past; but also to understand my current situation as the result of my

past history, not just causally, but in the sense that my past history has established the meaning of my present situation. Moreover, it involves thinking of myself as an agent (rather than a mere passive spectator of life) and therefore as someone who is partly responsible for the shape his life has taken. And it is also to understand myself as a being with an (indeterminate) future, which I am attempting to shape in certain ways that are intelligible to me (and at least potentially to others) as arising out of or responding to my current situation and the past that has shaped it. (p. 543)

Perhaps, narrative coherence is what Breanna had been seeking since her middle school years. Living in a space where her stories to live by felt fragmented, first as a person storying herself as a white while living in an Asian body, and then attempting to re-story herself as Asian while lacking the necessary experiential knowledge for that story to feel authentic, manifested in personal and social tensions and challenges. She was struggling to compose stories to live by that felt cohesive, authentic, and coherent.

And perhaps a search for narrative coherence is at the core of her hesitations around choosing a pseudonym, a “fake name” (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017) for use in this dissertation.

I didn't like the idea of a fake name. I am finally coming into myself, discovering who I am, and the idea of a fake name sounds unappealing to me. I have essentially been “fake” my whole life, trying to fit myself into different molds and become a person who I am not. Now, that I am wanting to come into myself and finding my unique path, I do not want to be named anything other than what I am. I think Breanna is just fine to use If the story were being written in Korean, I would prefer you to use Soo-Jin for my name, but since the narrative is written in English, Breanna is appropriate. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2016)

Her decision to use the name Breanna is an act of claiming her stories. It is a claiming of the stories of her adoption, the stories of her adoptive family, the stories others have told about her, and the stories she has told about herself. It is an act that is part of seeing her life as a whole life, and it became essential in her efforts to create narrative coherence around her multiple stories to live by. It is part of her search for authenticity, the claiming of her right to choose her own social roles (Carr, 1986) and her own stories to live by. It is fundamental in her efforts to answer the questions “Who am I?” She has named herself and attached all her stories to live by to that name.

It is important, however, to be cognizant of the incompleteness and tentativeness of these stories. As she indicates in her annal, she is *finding* herself, *accepting* herself, *growing* into being Asian. These are action verbs that express becomingness—she is in the midst of composing her life. This indicates that she has adopted an ecological approach (Root, 2003a) to the formation of her racial identity, which recognizes a variety of healthy racial identity resolutions and understands that a person’s racial identity may change over time. Breanna’s understanding of what it means to “be both” will likely take on new and more nuanced meanings as she continues to develop her understandings of what it means to be Asian and what it means to be white. Breanna spoke of this as we concluded the inquiry.

I am still very much in the process of figuring myself out, and I don’t actually know if I ever will. That is, in the sense that I don’t know if I will ever feel completely at home in one culture/identity, even in that which is my own personal blend of Korean and white. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

Chapter 6: Nicole

Coming into relationship with Nicole

I received an email from Nicole a week after I sent recruitment emails (see Appendix B) to the members of MRMC²⁸, an organization that serves the multiracial and multicultural population, at Midwest University. She said she, “would love” to be part of my study, but was concerned she might be excluded because she no longer attends MWU and could not easily travel to the MWU campus. She wondered if we could meet via phone or Skype for the interviews. I responded letting her know that attendance at MWU was not a requirement for participation, but meeting in person for research conversations was preferable. Wondering if we might be able to arrange a mutually convenient meeting point for research conversation, I asked where she was currently living and gave her the name of the city where I live. Later that same day she emailed to tell me she had moved to a city about a three-hour drive from where I live, but her parents live close to me and she would travel home on a regular basis to see them.

A few days later I sent her an email to arrange a phone conversation to discuss the study and possible logistics. When we spoke that evening, she explained that at the end of the prior academic year she transferred from MWU to a small nursing college in a neighboring state. I asked about her racial heritage, and she told me her father is white and her mother is Vietnamese. She also mentioned that she was instrumental in the formation of MRMC. It seemed to me that a person who put forth the effort to create an organization for persons with multiple racial heritages might have valuable and meaningful stories of experience that could add an interesting dimension to this inquiry.

²⁸ The actual name of this organization is rather unique, so a fictitious name was created to protect Nicole’s identity. The name is an acronym formed by the first and middle letters of the words multiracial and multicultural.

I spoke about how the birth of my grandson, and my discovery of the dearth of children's literature with multiracial characters, led me to this inquiry. I explained that through the inquiry I hoped to gain understanding of the experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages both inside and outside of school, with the goal of making a positive contribution to the efforts of teachers in their work with children with multiple racial heritages.

We discussed the structure and the time commitment of the study. I explained that the research methodology I chose for this inquiry would necessitate that she and I come together in on-going, in-depth conversations. The nature of narrative inquiry would, I explained, make phone or Skype interviews less than ideal. She expressed that she was extremely interested in participating and wondered if we could arrange to meet during her visits home to see her parents, which would be about once a month. That seemed to be a manageable solution to our logistical challenges. I felt a great enthusiasm and high level of interest from her as we spoke. I also felt that we would be able to work well together in the co-composition of this inquiry, so I invited her to participate.

We decided to schedule our first meeting for a few weeks later when she would be visiting her family for Thanksgiving. I reserved a small meeting room at a local public library that was geographically convenient for us both. I arrived a few minutes early so I could organize the needed supplies: the informed consent form, a pen, and a recording device. A few moments later a young woman walked by the door of the meeting room; she quickly turned back, looked in, and asked "Mary Jo?" We greeted each other and she joined me at the small conference table. As we spoke I felt excitement, anticipation, and eagerness building between us. It seemed that we were both looking forward to the work

we were embarking upon. After discussing the ethics document and obtaining her signature on the form we began our conversation.

Stories of Family

To begin our conversation, and hoping to create a space of comfort, I asked Nicole to tell me a bit about herself and her family. Her openness quickly became apparent as she spoke about her immediate and extended family and their importance in her life. For Nicole and her family, being together has always been a priority.

I spent a lot of time with my dad's side. He has six siblings and multiple cousins, so we spent a lot of holidays, and they're so very close. My dad's side, they're into 4-H²⁹ and fishing and outdoorsy, so hanging out with my cousins, riding horses and camping. And then, going fishing with my cousins, so, we had that experience . . . subdued, relaxing, fishing, horseback riding. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Her time with her mother's side of the family provided a much different experience.

On my mom's side, going to family get-togethers where there was karaoke and smoke, and Vietnamese food piled high, literally layers of plates and food on top of each other, just eating, just rowdy extended family everywhere and smoke, all the men smoke. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Nicole explained that when her mother was eight years old her maternal grandparents were forced to flee their homeland at the end of the Vietnam War.

My mom's side being from southern Vietnam, Saigon, I guess now it's Ho Chi Min City, before they came my grandmother worked for the southern Vietnamese government and my grandfather was in the military. That obviously made them a target come the war, and they got flight lifted out. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

This experience gave rise to a desire to stay connected to their Vietnamese culture.

²⁹ In the United States, 4-H is often located in rural areas. According to the 4-H website, they serve children and youth ages 5-18 through clubs, camps, and school base programs "grounded in the belief that kids learn best by doing. Kids complete hands-on projects in areas like science, health, agriculture and citizenship". The 4 h's "head, heart, hands, and health are the four values members work on through fun and engaging programs" (<https://4-h.org/>).

Especially coming from a war-torn country, they wanted to preserve their culture. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

This not only included retaining traditional social practices, but also staying connected to family.

I think they went to Hawaii first and then California and then ended up [here]³⁰. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

I think my entire grandpa's side is here, all kind of dispersed all over [this Midwestern state]. It's mostly my grandma's side that's still back in Vietnam. [My grandma] followed her oldest brother [here] and that's where they've been forever.

All of that movement, do you know what sparked all that movement?

It was mostly following family around. They always went to places where they could find each other, have that support system.

(Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Nicole's stories of and about family revealed a profound bond no matter how far apart they are geographically or how often they see each other.

We grew up with a huge, that's everything that my parents always said, family first. All you have is family really. Everyone can come and go, but family is constant, so just keeping that connection. My mom calls my aunts and uncles all across the country, and we have conversations all the time. It is harder with my relatives in Vietnam and elsewhere . . . We stay connected by communicating and knowing we're family. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

As I reflected upon her stories of family I

Family first. saw this *family first* philosophy being passed from generation to generation on both sides of her family. It became a story that was recomposed and retold in the family life her parents created for themselves and their children. They shaped a family culture—family traditions and practices—that involved spending time together, sharing experiences, and staying connected with each other. They

³⁰ Nicole is referring to the Midwestern state where her parents live and where she grew up.

made it a practice to go on family outings, and they regularly traveled together as an immediate family and with extended family.

My entire family saved up, like my mom's side and then my dad, and we went to Italy together. That was really fun. They exposed us to European culture. I think travel kind of shape me a lot too.

I'm more open-minded about people and different experiences.
(Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

The living out of their *family first* philosophy across generations provided Nicole with a varied cultural background – the white culture of her father's family, the Vietnamese culture of her mother's family, and a newly created blended culture of her immediate family.

***And it was just an interesting thing . . .
I had three different cultures I was kind of living in.***
(Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Thinking narratively about culture I see it as the combined stories to live by of a people. They are stories of beliefs, customs, social practices, roles, and so forth, which are passed from generation to generation. This led me to see Dewey's (1938/1997) principle of continuity of experience in relation to people collectively, which in turn impacts the experiences of individuals. As Dewey (1938/1997) explained, "we live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities" (p.39). Along the way, however, these stories to live by are recomposed in their living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Huber et al., 2013).

My mom and dad are actually the first in both their families to kind of break the mold, and that was met with a lot of heat from mostly my mom's side. It was kind of like turning your back a little bit. So, my grandparents weren't exactly happy about it at first. They met my dad and everything's fine. My dad's family

welcomed my mom with open arms. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Nicole alludes to the creation of a personal relationship that opened a space in which her maternal grandparents felt comfortable welcoming her father into their family, even though he did not share their cultural stories to live by. This welcoming and the welcoming of her mother by her father's family may have opened a space that allowed her mother's and father's cultural stories to live by to coexist while they also composed a cultural story to live by for their newly created family.

Nicole pointed out, however, that the way she lives out these three cultural stories to live by is unique to her and is in some ways dependent upon the physical expression of her racial heritages. Her relationship with her brother, Alan, contributed to her coming to this awareness.

Not all mixed children look the same. My brother has lighter skin tone, his hair is more brown than black, his eyes, he has such a cool eye color, it's more golden brown than a dark chocolate, and he could pass as completely white, which mostly people assume he is. I don't know what his experiences are exactly, but he does look more Caucasian and so, I guess people don't really ask him much about it. We had this weird conversation; we wished that we looked more Asian so people wouldn't be so confused by it. And we could identify more easily . . . he wears this Buddha chain kind of like a reminder that just because people don't think I am I am [Vietnamese]. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Physical appearance can significantly impact what others understand to be a person's cultural and racial heritage. This can invalidate a person's self-identification and desires to be connected with a heritage and culture that is not visually apparent. Nicole stories Alan as pushing against such invalidations and judgments by choosing to wear a visible sign of his otherwise invisible cultural and racial heritage.

Prior to our second research conversation I asked Nicole to bring special pictures or items with her to serve as “a rich source of memories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). She brought a large selection of photos mostly of family members. She began by showing me pictures of her maternal grandfather’s sixtieth birthday celebration, traditionally considered a significant milestone in Vietnamese culture. She then flipped through pictures introducing me to her grandparents, her mother’s cousins, aunts and uncles, her brother, and her parents. Nicole pointed out a picture of her cousin, Rachel, the daughter of her mother’s cousin who is married to a white woman. As Nicole pointed out, her mother and father were the first members of their families to marry a person not of their race, however, several more have done so since. Nicole commented that Rachel,

has somehow ended up with blond hair, kind of dirty blond, which is really interesting genetically. She’s half Vietnamese, yet she came out more Caucasian looking. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Nicole also showed me a picture of her cousin, Amanda, on her father’s side of the family. It became evident that they share a close bond, and as children they decided it was important to create a visual expression of this connection.

We always had matching outfits. When we’d go spend the night the first thing we’d do is go to the mall and buy matching outfits. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

While it is not uncommon for children to desire such expressions of friendship and connections, one only has to visit a store that carries jewelry for early teen girls to see numerous items designed for that purpose, I wonder if the wearing of matching clothes may have been more than that for Nicole and Amanda. I wonder if they were, in some way, attempting to express their connection to each other even though they did not

physically resemble each other. Perhaps this desire was connected to how Nicole sees herself within her family.

In regards to my family, my dad's side or my mom's side, they're family. They're always going to love me unconditionally, but they just can't relate to my experiences of being too much this for that and vice versa for the other part of me. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

Going to my white side, they still love me, but I'm not blond-haired, blue-eyed, or redhead like them. You've been raised differently than they have, because you're a mix of two different sides. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

Sometimes when I was with my dad's side and I would be getting ready to celebrate some Vietnamese holiday or using chopsticks. It kind of felt like I was . . . some kind of museum exhibit. But my mom's side, more like celebrating, like "Oh, wow, you use chopsticks so well. Because I'm part white, they weren't expecting me to know how to do things. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

I came to see that even though Nicole feels loved and cared for by everyone on both sides of her extended family she also knows that they do not completely understand her and the life she lives. This, I imagine, separates Nicole from them and them from her. She is living in an in-between space inhabited by very few people in her life.

As Nicole continued through her photo collection I asked her to select one special picture that stood out to her.

I actually brought one. For a while we'd always have birthday pictures . . . just at Target. We'd dress up and the whole nine. This is me, I think [I was] seven. I'm wearing traditional Vietnamese clothing called an áo dài, which directly translates to long shirt. I loved wearing these. This looks so cool with the little fortune glitter pattern that's in there. It's like a princess. It's all long and flowy. This is my mom's necklace with the Buddha, and I had little bangles and a little gold ring. That's my doll that looks just like me.

American Girl doll?

Mm-hmm. I got her for Christmas I think when I was six.

When I ask you to pick one picture you knew exactly the one. Why is this one so special to you?

Because it shows my Vietnamese side and I was just so happy and proud of it, and then also it blends in with my American Girl doll, kind of like a blending of cultures . . . I just felt really special, because my outfit was so cool. Just a really proud moment I guess.

(Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Listening to Nicole tell this story I became attentive to her description of her clothing and the items that she wore, such as her mother's Buddha necklace, and I recalled that her brother also wears a Buddha necklace. This brought forth wonderings in me about how her family lives out their stories of religion.

You've talked about that you and your brother both wear jewelry with Buddha, but your dad is . . .

Methodist.

How does that Christian and Buddhist, how does that work?

It's a weird blend. We don't really go to church anymore. Not that I guess we've been religious people, but we used to go to church for a little bit. There is no clash really, just kind of keep it separate. We still celebrate Christmas and Buddhist practices.

I think it kind of helped that my mom tried to assimilate to it. My mom's side tried to assimilate. They held on to their Vietnamese culture, but then they realized, "Oh, I can't just grip onto it." You have to make it easier on yourself, try to assimilate a little bit.

(Nicole, research conversation December 12, 2016)

The idea of assimilating gave me pause; assimilation seemed to bump against the stories Nicole tells about her Vietnamese family staying connected to their cultural traditions. As I reflected upon this, it seemed that assimilation is often spoken of in either/or terms – one chooses to assimilate or one chooses not to assimilate. In addition, when I hear news reports around calls for immigrants to assimilate, become Americanized, they frequently include the adoption of the English language. It is,

however, much more complex. Drawing on the work of Alba and Nee, Rumbaut (2015) explains,

sociologically, [assimilation] has been defined as a multidimensional process of boundary reduction and brokering, which blurs and dissolves an ethnic distinction and the social and cultural differences and identities associated with it

formerly distinguishable ethnocultural groups become effectively blended into one (p. 81)

Thinking narratively, I see the process of assimilation as the recomposing of cultural and ethnic stories to live by. It may also involve the letting go of stories to live by that have been lived, told, retold, and relived (Clandinin, 2013) for generations. Assimilation, then, is a renegotiation of cultural identity for individuals and for peoples. This renegotiation, even if entered into willingly, is likely to give rise to tensions as stories to live by bump against each other, and as one makes decisions about which stories to live by will be retained, which will be recomposed, and which will be set aside. DeWind and Kasinitz (1997) assert, “there is a good deal of choice and negotiation in determining what part of the ‘ethnic heritage’ immigrants will retain in the U.S. contexts, and what can be redefined and reworked, and what comes to be seen as expendable” (p. 1103).

Assimilating to the U.S. is tough, and you want to hold on so tight to your culture, but then again people aren’t very accepting of you especially with the whole mass immigration of Vietnamese here. So, my mom’s siblings, they don’t speak Vietnamese anymore but they understand it, because they have no need for it now except talking to my grandparents. But, my mom is like holding on so tight; she still speaks Vietnamese to my grandparents and to the entire family. And, celebrates the holidays still, and everything. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

This story fragment is heavy with bumpings, tensions, negotiations, and choices around the process of cultural assimilation for Nicole's mother and her family. It also illustrates the complexities and choices involved as the process moved from the generation of Nicole's grandparents to the generation of her mother.

Nicole wondered about how her parents negotiated the process of retaining, recomposing, and setting aside cultural stories to live by within their family as they raised their children.

I asked my mom, "So what was your strategy in raising me and my brother?"

She's said, "You know, the way your dad and I saw it is that it doesn't matter what you look like or anything like that. When it comes down to it, everyone has the same hopes and dreams. Every parent wants their kids to be happy and successful and as parents, we want to do whatever it is to make you succeed in life. We didn't want to raise you set in one way. That's why we stopped going to church because we wanted you to have that autonomy to make your own decisions Wow, that's really progressive for the time, because everyone else is raising their kids to be how they were raised, and yet they are totally deviating from what they grew up with.

(Nicole, research conversation, March 10, 2017)

Autonomy to make your own decisions

The desire on the part of her parents that she and her brother have the autonomy to make their own decisions regarding how they compose and recompose their cultural stories to live by implies that they believed that through their actions they are able to give children the freedom to do so. Thinking about freedom next to Dewey's (1938/1997) two principles of experience of continuity and interaction, and about situation, one might easily conclude that freedom, in its purest sense, does not exist. There are always social, historical, and contextual factors at play that impact the human experience that may curtail or eliminate freedom. I leave the pondering of this type of freedom to the philosophers, and turn my thinking toward freedom of choice; Carter (2004) asserts, "a

person has freedom of choice if she lacks constraints on the reasoned selection and performance of one or more of the items on an action-menu” (p. 69). While on a trip to Prague, Nicole began to formulate an action-menu, or a list of options, for the composition of her cultural stories to live by in relation to her imagined future children. Living within this list are issues of assimilation.

When I told people I was from [a Midwestern State], they would ask, “Where are you really from?” Then I’d have to explain my mom is from Vietnam and my dad’s from [a Midwestern State]. Then it was like, “Oh, that makes more sense.” And I was like, “yeah, Genetics. It comes out with this (referring to her physical characteristics), but not all the time.” Then that’s when I started thinking about, “When I have kids, I wonder what they’re going to look like . . . explaining to them, and to other people. “Oh, I’m part Vietnamese, part white,” and, “Oh, you don’t look it.” Then my kids, they’ll be even a smaller part Vietnamese and who knows what else, smaller part white, or I don’t know what the mix will be.

Being Vietnamese is a part of me, so I want my kids to know, but how much do I tell them or teach them because I don’t really know how to speak Vietnamese anymore, and that makes me sad. Just trying to work that out. “What do I pass along? Do I just let it go because they probably won’t look Vietnamese at all?” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

In the imagining of a future with children of her own, Nicole experienced a sense of uncertainty in the negotiation of her stories to live by around her cultural and racial heritage. She understands that the stories she composes will impact her children’s stories to live by. In an effort to negotiate these uncertainties she turned to her brother.

Recently my brother and I, we had this conversation about how we’re totally out of touch with the Vietnamese culture now, and just how sad it is, like there’s a part of us and just like don’t want to let go of it, but we’re not exposed to that much and there’s really no need for us to do it in this society. And then we talked about what are we going to do when we have kids . . . do we keep teaching them Vietnamese culture or will it not matter? It’s just sad because you want to teach them, but we don’t even know that much anymore either. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Nicole was telling a story of progressive assimilation taking place in her Vietnamese family as each subsequent generation becomes further and further removed from the immigrant experience and becomes increasingly embedded into U.S. society. She is wrestling with questions around what stories to retell and relive and how to go about that retelling and reliving. She is expressing an understanding that genetics and the physical expression of race, the passage of time, and societal forces all impact the decisions and choices one makes around assimilation. She also seems to be asking what DeWind and Kasintz (1997) have asked, “Do immigrants or their children really have a choice?” (p. 1102) in whether or not to assimilate.

Rumbaut (2015) argues, “the United States has been aptly described as a ‘graveyard’ for languages because of its historical ability to extinguish the mother tongues of immigrants within two or three generation” (p. 87). Nicole and her Vietnamese family seem to be experiencing this extinguishing and possibly the extinguishing of other elements of their Vietnamese heritages as the processes of assimilation continue, and stories to live by are composed, recomposed, and discarded, from generation to generation.

The great meaning, value, and strength of the *family first* story to live by in Nicole’s life became more and more evident as Nicole and I progressed through the inquiry. I also came to see it vividly represented in the graphic annal (see Figures 14.1 and 14.2) I asked her to create, which she brought to our fourth conversation. Nicole briefly spoke about each section of her annal beginning with the drawings of England, Germany, Ireland, and Vietnam (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. "Motherlands" Section of Nicole's Graphic Annal

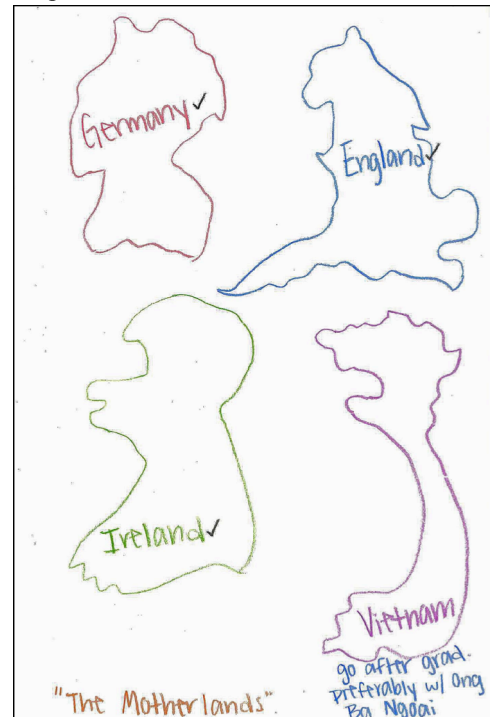


Figure 8. Section of Nicole's annal that focuses on her family's countries of origin.

I started out with my background. My dad's side is from England, Germany and Ireland, and I've been to all those places, and then the only one that I really want to go to is Vietnam. We have this running joke in my family that it's like the motherland. Here are the motherlands (pointing to her drawings of England, Germany, Ireland, and Vietnam). I keep talking about, "Oh yeah, I want to go back to the motherland," even though I've never been, so I really want to go back to Vietnam. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

After giving myself time to reflect upon her graphic annal in relation to her stories of experience, I went to her with my thoughts.

At first glance, when I looked at [your annal], it seemed that you were primarily representing your story in a timeline, but

when I looked a little more carefully and deeply, it seems to me that you're really telling stories of relationships.

And, not only your relationships with other people, but your relationship with yourself. I think that's really a central thread through your life.

Then, I started looking at your pictures of Germany and England and Ireland and Vietnam and how you have down here, the Motherlands. It's as if you are stretching yourself beyond physical places but then physical places ground you to your family and to your heritages. So these physical places are, for you, where you feel connection to relationships. Am I getting you?

Yeah. Pretty good.

Your family, your immediate family, your extended family, the people in your family and families are really a Motherland.

Yeah, I'd say so.

And you have great affection for all of your Motherlands.

Mm-hmm.

(Nicole, research conversation, March 19, 2017)

Nicole's graphic annal helped me see that as she has moved and continues to move through life from place to place, and as she comes into relationship with others, her connection to her family, her metaphorical motherland, has been and continues to be a profound influence on the shaping of her stories to live by.

That shaping influence often comes through familial narratives such as the *family first* narrative, and a narrative about the importance of education told by members of her immediate and extended families.

My dad started out at MWSU and then went to MWU. That's where he met my mom. My great grandmother went to MWU as well, she was one of the first women to graduate from MWU. I also have some family that went to MWSU. We had a very scholarly family on my dad's side. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

My mom, her side, they had a life in Vietnam and then came from nothing and worked all the way up. All her siblings are college graduates; my mom got her doctorate recently. It's like, powerhouses, it's insane, but like, so I've always grown up with very scholastic parents, and so education is really important. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

This is a story that was lived and told in her home well before Nicole was born. It came to her through her parents and was given to them by previous generations. Like the *family*

***We had a very scholarly family
Education is really important***

first story, it is a story that I came to see as

central to Nicole's unfolding life and the

composition of her stories to live by as she moves between her inside-of-school and outside-of-school places.

Stories of Elementary School

Nicole began her formal education at Hawthorn Elementary School where she attended kindergarten and first grades. In second grade her family moved to a new home

and she and her brother moved to Starlight Elementary where she remained through her sixth grade year. During our third research conversation Nicole and I spoke about her elementary school teachers and the environments they created.

At Hawthorn they were really nurturing. Then at Starlight it was kind of cold, I feel like their teaching style really created competitive children, because they're not really working together. A lot of the kids I grew up with were just really competitive about academics. Me, personally, I'm not competitive really at all. It's no big deal, just do well, and don't worry about what other people are doing.

It is kind of funny, as we got older we did more group work, and because people are so competitive there's really no cooperation. It was kind of tough working in groups, because I want to have everyone involved, but there's one person who's the loudest voice. It's kind of frustrating. It really did not work at all.

The school culture was at odds with the teaching strategy?

Yeah, which is interesting, because it's kind of setting you up for the rest of your life.

(Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

Nicole's stories of competition bumping against cooperation reminded me of my experiences as a sixth grade teacher in the late 1990s. I was teaching in a kindergarten through eighth grade parochial school, where participation in competitive sports was highly valued in the school community. It was common for students to play on club teams³¹ that traveled regionally and sometimes nationally. Both of my children attended this school and through their participation in club and school-based teams I witnessed the impact of competitive sports on them. Though participation seemed to bring joy, feelings of accomplishment, a community of friends, and the benefits of physical activity, it also

³¹ In the United States, club teams (in sports such as soccer, volleyball, and basketball) are competitive teams not affiliated with any school and funded by fees paid by parents. Generally, the purpose of these teams is to provide children with high skill levels an opportunity to play with and compete against similarly skilled opponents raising the level of competition above what would likely be available in school-based sports programs.

brought frustration, disappointment, the witnessing of inappropriate adult behavior at practices and games, and even verbal mistreatment by at least one coach.

In the classroom, competitive games were commonly used to motivate students and enhance their participation in learning activities. Beginning in the fifth grade, grade point averages were calculated and honor role positions were publicly announced quarterly. Some viewed this practice as a way to reward those who worked hard and inspire those who fell short. I took exception to this line of thinking knowing that some of my hardest working students would likely never attain those honors. Even though competition can motivate some students, I came to believe that the negative effects of competition outweigh the positive impacts in the classroom. I now agree with Deutch's (2006) stance,

competition induces and is induced by use of tactics of coercion, threat, or deception; attempts to enhance the power difference between oneself and the other; poor communication; minimization of the awareness of similarities in values and increased sensitivity to opposed interests; suspicious and hostile attitudes; the importance, rigidity, and size of issues in conflict; and so on. (p. 30)

I realize this position would likely be seen as contrary to the view of many who espouse the purported benefits of competition in school and in life.

My children and I arrived at that school in the fall of 1995. Having recently graduated with my degree in elementary education I was eager to implement strategies I learned in my teacher preparation program, including cooperative learning. A few members of the teaching staff and some parents embraced cooperative learning, but many pushed against it. Quite a few of my students, having little previous exposure to

cooperative learning (perhaps group work but not true cooperative learning), struggled even with my efforts to teach them to work cooperatively. Similar to Nicole's experiences, I witnessed some children taking charge and overshadowing others, some children attempting to cooperate with others, some children being observers, and some children withdrawing.

I recall one parent in particular who did not seem to understand how cooperative learning would advantage her child. In response to my use of cooperative learning literature circles and self- and peer-edited student portfolios, she came to me concerned that I was going to eliminate the use of grades in my classroom. For her, grades indicated where her child stood relative to the other students. It seemed she was more concerned with her child's ability to compete than cooperate. Perhaps she and others failed to understand, as Nicole does, that

unless you're in some kind of profession where you're alone, you're going to be with other people, you need to learn how to work with other people well.
(Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

As I reflected upon my experiences and placed them alongside Nicole's stories, it seemed that in both situations the stories told at school bumped against the stories told at home. For Nicole, the *family first* narrative told at home revolved around caring for and supporting each other. This story was part of her family's identity; it was one of their stories to live by. The stories told at school often revolved around competing with and rising above others. For me, I was attempting to infuse a story to live by of cooperation at school, while some of the stories to live by told at home seemed to be expressive of a competitive philosophy of human interaction.

I realize that human experience is always much more complex and multifaceted than the dichotomies I have presented. It is not my intention to imply that Nicole's family never advocated for competition or that her teachers never advocated for cooperative behavior – indeed both might have occurred. My intention is to bring forth significant and impactful stories that have been lived, told, relived, and retold at home and at school, and illustrate how those stories might bump against each other in the lives of children as they move between their home and their schools. The children, then, must compose their own stories to live by that are likely shaped by the stories lived and told in both contexts. For Nicole, her stories to live by around cooperation and competition draw heavily on the stories told at home.

Family first – care and support

***Competition –
not really working together***

***I'm not competitive really at all
Just do well
Don't worry about what other people are doing***

It was through this thinking that I was reminded of Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin's (2012) notion of familial curriculum making. At the outset of their inquiry into the lives of children, families, and teachers Huber et al. (2012) wondered if they could imagine . . . an account of parents'/families' and children's lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieu are in dynamic interaction. [They wondered], could familial curriculum making be understood as equally important to the negotiation

of a curriculum of lives as the in-classroom, in-school curriculum making?” (pp. 7-8)

In considering the notion of familial curriculum making it is important to consider the notion of curriculum, which is conceptualized, or defined, in multiple ways including: “a *plan* for achieving goals . . . a *system* for dealing with peoplea *field of study* [and] in terms of *subject matter*” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013, pp. 8-9). However, I see Huber, et al.’s (2012) notion of curriculum aligned with this definition, “curriculum can be defined broadly as dealing with the learner’s *experiences*” (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013, p. 8). By this definition, almost anything planned in or outside of school is part of the curriculum. This definition is rooted in Dewey’s definition of experience and education” (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2013, p. 8). Huber et al. (2012) wrote, “curriculum, at least the kind that spoke of the lived experiences of making curricula of our lives, was also being made in homes and communities, with families and others around diverse subject matter” (p. 142). Obviously, experiences, whether educative, non-educative, or miseducative (Dewey, 1938/1997), do not occur exclusively in schools and classrooms, but also in the home and community. In other words, curriculum making not only takes place in school, it also takes place within the family.

I came to see the *family first* story to live by that values cooperation and relationship building as part of the familial curriculum made within Nicole’s home. Living within the familial curriculum-making milieu shaped Nicole’s stories to live by, at least in part, in ways coherent with inducing cooperation “by perceived similarity in belief and attitudes, readiness to be helpful, openness in communication, trusting and friendly attitudes, sensitivity to common interests and deemphasis of opposed interests,

orientation toward enhancing mutual power rather than power differences, and so on” (Deutch, 2006, p. 30). Thinking about Nicole moving between her home and school places and negotiating the bumpings of her familial and school curriculums, I understood the moments of bumpings and negotiation as “curriculum-making moments” (Huber et al., 2012, p. 8). This positioned Nicole as both learner and curriculum maker in the work of composing the curriculum, or the course, of her life (Huber et al., 2012). In so doing, she was composing her stories to live by, her identity, around cooperation and competition. It is a story to live by that shaped her preferred learning environment.

What I'm hearing you say is that . . . the type of teacher that connects with you as a student, is one that interacts with you more relationally, as opposed to, "I'm the boss, and do what I say." . . . I'm just seeing this connection [with] your family first philosophy from your family. When a teacher interacts with you in a way that the classroom is more of a family unit, then that works better for you as a student?

Yeah, that's true. I definitely try to build relationships with my instructor and my peers . . . I've always done better when I feel that connection, like teacher/friend and student/friend. I can go to them and feel comfortable, instead of being intimidated by their authority. Yeah, you're definitely right.
(Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

I saw a “dynamic interaction” (Huber et al., 2012, p. 8) taking place as Nicole moved between the contexts of immediate family, extended families, school, and the broader community. For example, Nicole’s entrance into the context of Starlight Elementary, where her physical appearance stood in contrast to that of her teachers and peers, interacted with her past experiences as a learner in both her familial and school contexts. As a result, she came to a new realization.

I went to Starlight second grade all up to sixth grade, and that's when I kind of realized, oh, I'm totally different than all these other people. Starlight, it wasn't very diverse. It was a whole bunch of blond hair blue-eyed children, and wow, I look completely different. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

As might be expected, her peers also noticed her physical appearance differed from that of their own. This led one of her peers to express a wondering about that difference.

Star of the Week, this was a second grade thing where each week there's a student of the week and beginning of the week all the kids write letters to the person and it's really awkward. You sit there and people read letters to you about you, like, "So what's your favorite color?" "What's your favorite book?" It was just uncomfortable, but that's the first time anyone ever asked me what I am, specifically if I was Hispanic or not. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

Since her classmate was not aware of Nicole's Vietnamese heritage, it is possible that information about her heritage was not part of how she was introduced when she arrived at her new school. If so, one might see the failure to acknowledge Nicole's racial heritage as an attempt to be or appear to be colorblind, to not see race. Such an approach is quite likely "a disservice, not only to biracial students, but also to all students" (Baxley, 2008, p. 231). For me, this possibility brings wonderings about lost learning opportunities for Nicole, her teacher, and her peers. I also wonder about misconceptions that might have arisen about Nicole. Perhaps one such misconception was revealed when her teachers and peers came to know about her Vietnamese heritage.

As I got older I started learning about the Vietnam War, people would always focus on just the Vietnamese part of me. Like, oh, you're Vietnamese, you know what this is; can you tell us about it? I was, I don't know, I'm only 10. And that kept happening all the way up till middle school; we'd learn about the Vietnam War and people would single me out. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

This story reminded me of Adichie's (2009) idea of seeing a person through the lens of a single story. Nicole's teachers and peers, it seems, saw her as the voice of the Vietnamese people in their classroom, and in that understanding of her they assumed a single story of being Vietnamese and all persons of Vietnamese heritage must, therefore, know and tell that story. Adichie (2009, n.p.) asserted, "the consequence of a single story is this: it robs

people of dignity, it makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult, it emphasizes that we are different rather than how we are similar”. Seeing Nicole through the lens of a single story negated her individuality, her subjectivity, and her fullness as a human person. It made her an object of stereotypical thought.

During this time Nicole also realized that the history and heritages of many people were absent from the subject matter being taught in her inside-of-school contexts.

It was just a huge group of people were missing from history in school. So, I was like, “Where do I fit in?” It’s very much chunks, like Texas becoming a state and how, from what I remember, the only instance where you hear about Mexicans or Hispanics, anything like Spaniards. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

Even though there were classroom discussions about the Vietnam War those stories failed to acknowledge the multiplicity and complexity of her stories to live by, and she found it difficult to identify where she fit within the stories of history told at school.

We started to learn about Martin Luther King and black history, and I wasn’t saying I was African American, but like colored people, I was like, “Well, I don’t look white. Would I be considered this?” I didn’t want to ask a teacher for whatever reason, so I asked one of my peers, and they were like, “You’re not black.” I was like, “Well, duh, I know that, but where do I fit in? Where do Asian people and other people fit, because we’re not colored,” at least that’s what I thought. I was just kind of confused about that aspect of history when I was younger. That’s the first instance in school where I was like, “Wait. What about this entire group of people because it’s very much like Caucasian white and African Americans throughout history and then all of a sudden you jump to the Vietnam War and you actually get a little taste of Asia. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

In her graphic annal (see Figure 9), Nicole illustrated relationship tensions she experienced during her elementary school years as she moved from Hawthorn Elementary to Starlight Elementary. As some questioned her racial heritage and others focused on her Vietnamese heritage, her own wonderings emerged around her racial

identity. This, combined with a lack of representation of her racial heritage with the stories told through the school curriculum led Nicole to ask,

What am I?

Yet, Nicole storied the teachers she had during her upper elementary years as being more interested in building positive relationships with their students as compared to those she had during her second and third grade years.

When I got to fourth, fifth, and sixth grade the teachers were more nurturing and actually cared about how each student was doing, and not just spitting out the general information. The one thing that stands out in my mind is that they would sit down to teach. It put them at our level, rather than us sitting down and them just barking at us. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

I experienced distress hearing that Nicole felt barked at by her teachers. I am comforted and relieved that she found some of her teachers to be caring and nurturing. However, I wonder how successful her teachers were in their efforts to nurture her, to connect with her, and to create a “teacher/friend and student/friend” (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016) relationship that Nicole found to be most beneficial. Perhaps, even as her “nurturing” teachers attempted to draw their students close to them they were inadvertently pushing Nicole away through their classroom curriculum making.

Nicole was able, however, to find a person with whom she shared a common experience and with whom she fit.

I met my best friend, Alisha, in fifth grade. We met at Starlight, and we’re still friends. She’s half white, half African American, so we had that mixed kid

Figure 9. Elementary School Section (Part 1) of Nicole’s Graphic Annal

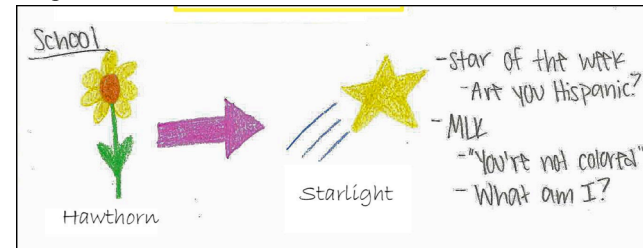


Figure 9. Section of Nicole’s elementary school annal that focuses on her movement from Hawthorn Elementary School to Starlight Elementary School.

bond. She was the first person, I would say, that I met that was mixed [other than a family member].

Even though we were different mixes, it was like you kind of get it. We just pretty much bonded in being different, like the same because we're mixed. It's just nice knowing there's someone kind of like you out there. We really related on being too much this, and too much for that. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

My thoughts returned to a conversation that I had several years ago with a friend. She is white, her husband is African American, and they have four children. She told me she noticed that when her children are with other mixed race children they seem to connect with each other in ways that do not happen when they are with their monoracial friends. She also spoke about realizing that neither she nor her husband completely understand their children's experiences as neither of them are mixed race. For Nicole, coming into relationship with Alisha provided her with another person, in addition to her cousin Rachel and her brother Alan, who occupies the in-between space of multiple racial heritages.

Meeting Alisha, and it's like, "You get it." . . . We had different experiences, but because we're mixed, there was just that instant connection. We kind of bonded over . . . fitting in with each other. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2016)

As illustrated in her graphic annal (see Figure 10), Nicole felt separated from most of her peers. This separation was marked by, and in some ways a result of, differences in her physical features when compared to the majority of her peers. However it was also intimately related to differences in experiences. While she and many of her peers in some way shared the experience of being a member of the white community and living within white culture, they likely had no experiential understanding of living with a second culture or a third culture. With Alisha she felt no such separation; she felt

You get me!

Figure 10. Elementary School Section (Part 2) of Nicole's Graphic Annal

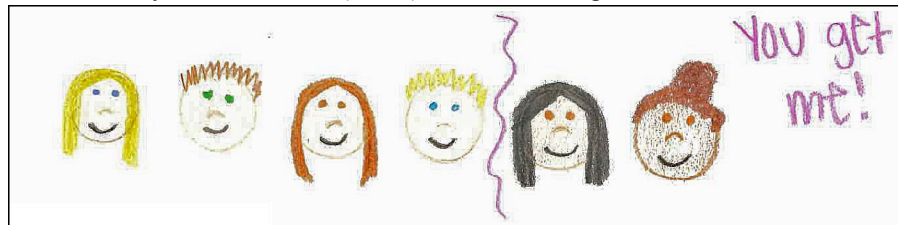


Figure 10. Section of Nicole's elementary school annal that focuses on her relationships with her peers.

With Alisha she felt understood. It was an understanding that came as a result of having similar experiences, similar relationships with family members and peers, and similar emotional responses.

Stories of Middle School

With the transition to middle school Nicole turned her relationship building efforts primarily toward her peers.

In middle school I kind of shifted more from trying to have that friendly relationship with my teachers, to more focusing on peers, because we're all just so uncomfortable and awkward at that stage, and it's just so much easier to relate to people who are going through the same things with you. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

Nicole saw this movement as being connected to the structure and functioning of her middle school, as well as in response to physical and emotional changes that are common during adolescence.

In middle school you have the bigger populations, so it was kind of less competitive. It was just less stress, but you had other things to worry about, like hormones, and all these changes, and you feel like you're so uncomfortable in your own skin, because of changes and puberty. You have more teachers in middle school, because you have seven class periods, so it's a little bit harder to get to know them.

The family kind of environment wasn't there?

No, not really. Do your work, and then go see your friends in the hall. You would have that one good friend or group of them.

(Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

I asked Nicole to tell me about the friends she welcomed into her life as she moved into and through adolescence.

I've always had a diverse group of friends. I have Caucasian friends, and then Hispanic. In middle school, up until high school I had a gay friend, actually multiple [gay friends]. That was in middle school, before anyone was officially out, but they came out later in high school, just different experiences and personalities definitely. I had guy friends, and then girl friends, yeah, so just that mix, and different intellects, and interests. I was interested in everything, so I kind of gravitate toward people that I find interesting, that can build me up in a way, my experiences, and my knowledge base, because they know different things, and I know different things. Kind of sharing that. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

During our next conversation I asked her to tell me more about her friend making process.

I don't really know how I became friends with my friends. I feel like it just happened. People usually become friends with people who are similar. Well, I'm not very similar, besides me and Alisha when I was in elementary school and then later when I met other mixed kids. I think being mixed helps, because you don't really fit in, so why limit yourself? At least that's what my thinking is, and then also why become friends with people that are just like you? (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2016)

In this story fragment I heard Nicole expressing a social freedom to choose friends in a way that monoracial people may not experience.

You don't fit in, so why limit yourself?

Her stories also brought forth a conscious awareness that the curriculum made in her home significantly shaped the composition of this story to live by.

It's more interesting when your friends are different because they can contribute to you overall, give you their experiences and their outlook on things. It just makes you more knowledgeable, and I guess interesting, because you know so much more. That's another thing my parents always stressed is,

“Why limit yourself? Be open to options and different experiences.” That’s pretty much what I did. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2016)

Her openness to a diverse group of friends may also be connected to her family’s interest in cultures other than their own.

They exposed us to European culture; it was completely different from the United States. I think travel kind of shaped me a lot too.

I’m more open-minded about people and different experiences.

(Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Why limit yourself?

Be open to options and different experiences

As I pondered her words I saw an

interaction between the *why limit yourself*

and the *education is important* narratives told to her by her parents. By being open to and coming into relationship with a diverse group of friends she is educating herself about others, how they live, how they view the world. I am reminded of Dewey’s (1938/1997) “idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education” (p. 20). For Dewey, education does not happen exclusively in schools and classrooms; it happens through our experiences as we interact with others in multiple contexts and draw upon our previous experiences. As Nicole drew upon her prior familial experiences and came into social interactions with her friends, she became more educated about them, herself, and the world she lives in. It became a way for her to expand personally and socially. Rather than a source of separation, difference became a path toward educative experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997)—experiences that draw upon past experiences, result in valuable learning in the present, and lead toward future growth.

Outside her diverse friend group, differences continued to be a source of separation as others in Nicole’s middle school again brought forth questions about her

racial and ethnic heritage that seemed to draw upon a single story (Adichie, 2009) regarding persons with Vietnamese heritage.

[In middle school] is kind of where things got more annoying in regards to asking about the Vietnam War, like “What side was your mom on?” That was really important, like are you on the good side or the bad side? And then, “What’s this?” What does this mean? Have you ever had this?” and “What’s your mom’s story of coming here?” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

These questions came not only from her peers, but also from at least one teacher.

I had great teachers, except there was one, my communications teacher in seventh grade. We read a book about a girl who came from Vietnam. The entire time, “Oh, Nicole, talk about this.” “Uhhh, I don’t want to, I don’t know.” (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Looking to Nicole’s graphic annal (see Figure 11) and the list of questions others asked her, I felt a sense of bombardment, which gave rise to feelings of frustration. Struggling to deal with her frustration, Nicole turned to her parents for guidance.

Figure 11. Middle School Section (Part 1) of Nicole’s Graphic Annal

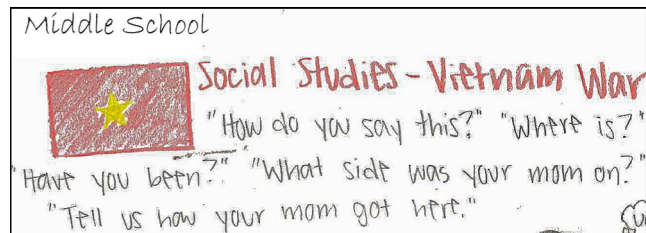


Figure 11. Section of Nicole’s middle school annal that focuses on experiences related to her Vietnamese heritage.

My parents told me when I was in middle school and I’d come home, like, “I’m so annoyed that people keep asking me about Vietnam. I don’t really know that much. It’s not like I’m a super genius about it,” and then they’re just like, “You can’t control them. You can control how you react to it. It can either bog you down and you can be angry or just brush it off. You don’t have to hold onto this anger because that gets you nowhere.” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

*You can’t control them
You can control how you react*

Nicole’s reliance on her familial curriculum making is evident as she

negotiated the bumpings and tensions that developed in the social contexts of her middle school. Nicole is not unique in her reliance on the curriculum made within the family; “research indicates that adolescents’ relationships with their parents influence their interactions with peers” (Steinberg & Morris, 2001, p. 93). Collins and Laursen (2004) explain, “despite the stereotype of incompatible and contradictory parent and friend influences, it is more accurate to describe parent-child relationships as setting the stage for both the selection of friends and the management of these relationships” (p. 58). Nicole’s familial curriculum assisted her with redirecting herself away from annoying and frustrating peer interactions, as well as similar interactions with teachers, and toward her academic work.

I’ve always been really focused; that’s always been my drive. [My parents] always pushed me, not pushed me to the extent where I’m totally stressed out by grades, but like you can do anything, I believe in you. They’d always sit down and help me with homework. So, that was always instilled in me; you do well in school, you can go the distance and do whatever you want. So, just staying focused on that and not on social interactions I had with my peers. I can’t let that bother me. I have a goal to attain. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

***You do well in school
You can go the distance
Do whatever you want***

I see the *family first* narrative
living in Nicole’s reliance on the advice
and support of her parents, that came in

the form of retellings of the *education is important, you can go the distance, and do whatever you want* narratives. All these narratives are part of her familial curriculum making and have shaped Nicole’s stories to live by. As a result, Nicole composed a story of being focused on her educational goals rather than on distressing comments from others that set her apart from them.

Alongside overt messages of difference, such as questions that revolved around her Vietnamese heritage, lived more covert messages of separation. Nicole came to the realization that she was not represented in the curriculum composed at school by teachers and institutional curriculum planners.

I had this crazy middle school teacher; we would talk about slavery, and that's the first instance [in an academic setting] where being, unfortunately, a mixed child is talked about.

Unfortunately?

Unfortunately it took that long to get there, and then also unfortunate, the topic they were talking about, how it wasn't by choice, it was forced upon people. Being mixed was just a product of an unfortunate event or an unwanted event. There was a negative being a mixed child.

(Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

As Nicole points out, negative views, assumptions, and stereotypes around children with multiple racial heritages have been and continue to be prevalent in U.S. society. Kato (2000) articulated many of the facets of this phenomenon.

Multiracial children and interracial families have been the subject of many myths and taboos beginning with the purpose of their parents' union. Suspected reasons for interracial marriages have included a desire to gain wealth or status, sexual perversion, inability to attract a mate of the same race, and a desire to reject a racist society. It has been commonly, but erroneously, held that interracial marriages end in divorce more often than single-race marriages and that multiracial children are more emotionally confused than single race children

The most common myth concerning biracial or multiracial children is that in families of children of Caucasian and another race parent, the child must choose to identify with the racial heritage of the parent of color. (p. 37)

Nicole may not have been aware of the content and extent of these myths and taboos, but it seems likely that they impacted her experiences as her teachers and her peers brought some, if not all, of these myths into the classroom.

In addition, the books and curriculum materials around her did not represent her, her experiences, and her physical appearance.

Book wise, I don't remember what book it was exactly, but it was this book where they try to show the spectrum of skin color. Even there you would see that the parents are the same [as the kids]. If a kid's like my skin tone, the parents would be the exact same skin tone. So, I was still not represented. I can't really remember textbooks much, but I think it was the same deal. It was same parents, really no mixed children whatsoever. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

As I found in my research on children's picture books (Gates 2014) and intermediate novels³² (Gates 2016), and as Chaudhri and Teale (2013) found in their study of intermediate level contemporary realistic and historical fiction published between 2000 and 2010, it is difficult to locate children's literature that focuses on characters with multiple racial heritages. Chaudhri and Teale (2013) observed, "many in-print and online bibliographies, listservs and book lists exist for multicultural children's literature and include books with mixed race content, but they generally do not identify books focused on mixed race content as such" (p. 363). A combined search of the Library of Congress, the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin, and multiple online websites yielded 90 books that met their study criteria. Chaudhri and Teale (2013) put that number in perspective:

Approximately 5,000 children's books are published annually in the U.S. That makes these 90 books approximately 0.2% of the books published in the past

³² Intermediate level books are generally considered appropriate for readers between the ages of nine and fourteen.

decade. If we were to estimate that perhaps 20% of the children's books published in a year had an intended readership of children aged 9-14, that still means that only 1% of published books aimed at this age range included mixed race protagonists. This clearly indicates a dearth of mixed race voices in the realm of children's literature. (p. 363)

As a Vietnamese and white child, born of parents in a voluntary, committed, marital union Nicole was not represented in her inside-of-school curriculum books and resources. Nicole's growing awareness of her lack of representation took place alongside, or perhaps partially as a result of, adolescent identity work that often includes self-evaluation "along several distinct dimensions – academics, athletics, appearance, social relations, and moral conduct (Masten et al., 1995)" (Steinberg & Morris, 2001, p. 91). As reflected in Nicole's graphic annal (see Figure 12),

Figure 12. Middle School Section (Part 2) of Nicole's Graphic Annal

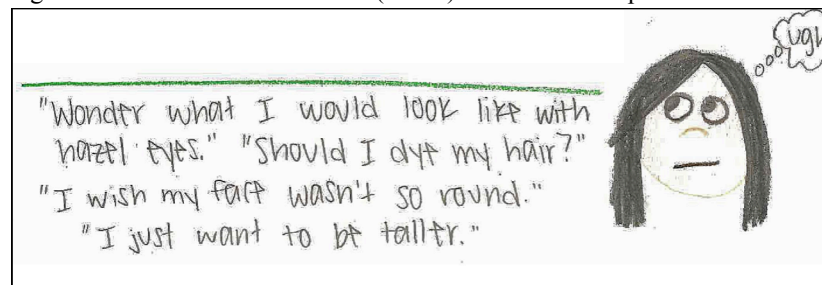


Figure 12. Section of Nicole's middle school annal that focuses on her wonderings about changing her physical appearance.

and the following story fragment, physical appearance seemed to be an especially salient dimension for Nicole, as it is for many adolescent females (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Then also during this time I was just kind of annoyed because puberty is awkward and I started wondering what I would look like if I had more Caucasian features. "What if I dyed my hair a lighter color? What if I had lighter eyes?" and "I wish my face wasn't so round," because typically Asians

have really round faces, which we can't help. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

Although changing one's physical appearance may be a common imagining for adolescent girls, Nicole's imaginings were intertwined with her feelings of being different and unrepresented in her school environment. Perhaps in not seeing herself in the classroom conversations, the available books, and the broad social context of a predominantly white school and community, she wondered if changes to her physical appearance might mitigate those feelings.

Yet, even the one physical change that Nicole could have brought into reality, lightening her hair color, was left in the realm of her imagination. This decision may have been connected to the *family first* narrative in that changing her hair color might have pushed against her stories of being a member of her family and her desire to continue to live her Vietnamese heritage. I also wonder if her decision to retain her hair color might have been connected to being a member of a diverse group of friends, in particular her friendship with Alisha. Perhaps within these friend relationships being different from the majority of her peers meant she fit, she belonged.

The bumpings and tensions present in Nicole's stories of middle school brought me to wonder about how she might envision a more positive, supportive, and affirming school environment.

Do you think it would have been better for your school environment had there been more kids that were mixed race?

I think it would help, because then I'd have more people to relate to All your peers have someone to relate to, because they're all the same, and they kind of have similar experiences.... Whereas me, I was just kind of trotting along, then I found [Alisha], and then we could share experiences that are kind of the same, and you belong, but not really Yeah, I think it would be

beneficial, because you always want someone to relate to that gets you as a whole, and not necessarily focuses on one aspect of you.

What can teachers do? Or, what have teachers done that has been beneficial, or not beneficial.

I guess the best things teachers can do is just teach, be nurturing, and not single someone out because of one part of what they are.

If a teacher made an effort to better understand your Vietnamese heritage, would you see that as a positive thing?

I think so, because not a lot of people know about Vietnamese culture. Their exposure is the Vietnam War, and how everyone hated the idea of it, and so many lives were lost It's nice when someone just doesn't focus on what they know from American history I definitely think if they asked me my experiences with Vietnamese culture, and my family's, it creates a better bond, rather than just assuming they know everything.

(Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

Nicole's imagined school contexts turned my thoughts to Lugones (1987) and her notions of "worlds" and "world" –travelling. For Lugones (1987), a "world" is a "construction of life" (p. 10); it is a combination of experiences, relationships, roles, and identities within a particular context. Lugones (1987) explains, one can live in multiple "worlds" simultaneously, and one can travel between worlds. In the previous story fragment I see Nicole longing for relationships with more people who are native inhabitants of her "world" of multiple racial heritages and more people willing to travel to her Vietnamese heritage "world". Nicole seems to understand that when someone focuses upon their limited knowledge of Vietnamese history and culture they are not travelling to her "world". They are staying in their own "world" and telling her what they believe about her "world".

To travel to the "world" of another one must adopt an attitude of "loving playfulness" which requires one to move away from being an arrogant perceiver

(Lugones, 1987) of the other person. One must not act from a position of self-importance, a position of knower. For someone, such as a teacher, to travel to Nicole's "world", that person would need to come to her humbly, with a respectful and loving openness, and with a willingness to be changed. That person would be willing to step beyond his or her own "worlds" and become a different person in Nicole's "world". A traveller to Nicole's "worlds" would need to place herself or himself in the position of learner, and place Nicole in the position of knower. Travelling to the "world" of another allows us to "understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

This is what I was unable to do when speaking with the parents of a child whose first language was Spanish. Similarly, when people in Nicole's life "rattle on about" (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016) what they know about the Vietnam War or Vietnamese food, they are presenting themselves as knowers and Nicole and her heritage as the object of that knowledge. Looking to her as a source of additional information about the topics they have chosen only reinforces that objectification. For Nicole to respond with feelings of annoyance, frustration, or anger seems normal and reasonable. Nicole's stories of difference and separation, and her emotional responses to those experiences, seem to express a longing to be seen as a subject in the eyes of others, not merely as an object of other's knowledge.

Stories of High School

During high school, Nicole's continued to negotiate the wonders of others around her racial identity.

In high school I went to see a teacher one afternoon and another teacher was in there sucking on a lollypop, he's the creative writing teacher He just sat there and then in the middle of our conversations he just tilts his head and stares at me, he's like, "What are you?" I was like, oh, and I had to explain everything. He was like, oh cool, and then just focused on the Vietnamese part and starts rattling off everything he knows about Vietnamese food and everything like that.

So how does that make you feel when somebody says, "What are you?"

It doesn't bother me that much. I don't know, most people probably would be bothered by that. I thought it was funny. That's really blunt. That could have been phrased much better, especially from a creative writing teacher. I'd rather have them ask me than just assume.

(Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Had this experience occurred during middle school it would have likely brought forth feelings of annoyance and frustration for Nicole. In high school, however, she was amused by the lack of sophistication in the formation of the question, and indicated she wanted the question posed rather than have a false assumption made. Nicole also changed her reaction to situations in which others view her as a definitive source of information about Vietnamese history and culture.

High school, this was the time where I stopped being annoyed with people assuming I know everything about Vietnam. I think it really just comes down to how you deal with things. My parents told me when I was in middle school "You can't control them. You can control how you react to it. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

Her becomingness in these types of interactions also involved a growing understanding of the other person's experiences.

If I was angry about every instance that someone brought up by just focusing on my Vietnamese culture, then I would probably still be where I was in middle school, but I've grown past that. I can't expect everyone to know everything, because I certainly don't. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

The retelling and reliving of this familial narrative may have also impacted Nicole's reaction to being racially misidentified. Her graphic annal (see Figure 13)

indicates that this was a particularly salient issue during her high school years, however her reactions began to shift.

[High school] is the period where I made it a game for myself to see what people think I am. I love hearing people, what they think . . . Hawaiian, Italian, Egyptian, Mexican, Hispanic, Turkish, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, Filipino, et cetera. No one ever guesses part Vietnamese.

(Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

People make a snap judgment based on beauty or skin tone and all their biases they've grown up with. When they see me, it's confusing. Sometimes people just don't even ask. They're like, "Oh, so you look Hispanic" or "You look Middle Eastern or Hawaiian" or whatever. I just go along with that, because it's comfortable for them. I love hearing what people think I am. I think it's really interesting. Then it makes me wonder what their experiences have been, what's their exposure. How did you come to that guess? (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Figure 13. Nicole's High School Graphic Annal



Figure 13. Nicole's high school annal that focuses on mistaken identities.

Although she is still not comfortable with a tendency on the part of others to make assumptions about her, misidentify her, or focus primarily on her Vietnamese heritage (all of which negate significant portions of her lived experiences), Nicole's reactions to these situations seem to indicate a desire to "world" –travel (Lugones, 1987).

As I returned to and reflected upon the above story, I was drawn to this phrase,

People make a snap judgment based on beauty or skin tone and all their biases they've grown up with. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

These words reminded me that our bodies mark us in the eyes of others. Skin tone, eye color, hair color and texture, facial features, and so forth, lead others to place us in

categories, one of which is often a racial category. Nicole has described both frustration and amusement as reactions to how others categorize her based on her physical appearance. She also felt a sense of relief when judgments about her racial identity dissipated, or at least they were not directly expressed to her.

People in high school didn't really focus on what I am, besides that one teacher I mentioned that was like, "What are you?" It was kind of nice, in a way, that I didn't have to keep explaining myself, because I did when I was younger. No one ever assumed, or at least didn't blatantly make it apparent that they assumed I was something else. It's important, but not the most paramount thing to let everyone know I'm part white, part Vietnamese. It is my identity, but I feel like you shouldn't have to constantly tell people, because everyone else doesn't. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

I imagine, for Nicole, not having to explain herself, as others do not have to explain themselves, created a sense of belonging, a feeling of being like everyone else, a feeling of fitting in. I am reminded that to be able to walk through life without others questioning your racial heritage is a privilege that those of us with white skin often take for granted. Nicole is quite aware that she lives in a "world" in which she frequently feels the repercussions of living amongst people who fail to recognize their privilege. Perhaps, as a result of that failure, those same people also fail to understand how their questions and confusions about her racial heritage remind her that she lacks that privilege.

While Nicole's high school experiences included situations such as her creative writing teacher asking her, "What are you?", and her annal indicates that there were situations in which people misidentified her racial heritage, on the whole she found high school to be quite enjoyable.

High school was actually a lot of fun, the classes were interesting, and I think I did better in high school because we had those teacher/student relationships that are more buddy-buddy, than more authoritative. Then, there's still the old school teachers who would just stand in front of the room, and talk to you. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

The presence of teachers with whom Nicole could create positive, supportive, caring relationships provided Nicole with opportunities to live out her *family first* familial narrative within the context of her high school.

Stories of College

College is everyone's awakening, I guess. I got into sophomore and junior year I started doing conferences that MWU puts on. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Nicole was including herself when she spoke of college being an awakening, and she linked her awakening to participating in a variety of extracurricular organizations and activities.

Then I would join a whole bunch of things, like a sorority, Alpha Chi Omega, Circle of Sisterhood, Vietnamese Student Association, Global Partners, Blood Drive, MWUnity, LeaderShape, Colors of MWU. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

The Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) provided a place where Nicole felt completely accepted as a person with Vietnamese heritage.

[VSA] just made me feel really welcomed. My Vietnamese family loves me, and all that, but it's still kind of awkward. VSA was totally a different experience; I was actually with younger people. I made some great friends. I actually felt welcomed, they didn't care that I wasn't full on. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Her multiple racial heritages did not cause separation as it has in other places and contexts. Perhaps the connection was related to common experiences as young adult, Vietnamese, college students at MWU. Perhaps Nicole saw herself reflected in the experiences of others. I wonder if this opened a space where friendships could flourish. I also wonder if the creation of those relationships and the feeling of being completely

welcomed might have been connected to seeing her physical features—such as skin tone, hair color, and facial features—reflected in those around her.

In her sorority life, however, partially sharing a racial heritage did not result in the same feelings of welcome, acceptance, and belonging.

I guess the only organization I've kind of really bumped in with every thing would be Greek Life Panhellenic, because stereotypically, and how it is just looking at people, it's blond hair, blue eyes, Caucasian, white women, and then here's me and a few other minority women. Greek Life is not cheap by any means, so you already have these affluent women, and I'm not as high. I still have that privilege of being able to afford it, but then because of MWUnity³³ and the Greek retreats and every other retreat I've done, I've been exposed to these other groups of people that don't have all this, and you need to essentially check your privilege. (Nicole, research conversation, May 12, 2017)

This story fragment illuminates the impact of privilege in relation to being accepted or not, feeling welcomed or not, fitting in or not. I was reminded of the work of McIntosh (1990) and other scholars³⁴ around the concept of white privilege. While race and privilege are closely tied (Black & Stone, 2005), there are many other aspects of an individual that may be involved in the level of privilege bestowed by society, such as “gender . . . sexual orientation . . . socioeconomic status (SES), age, differing degrees of ableness, and religions affiliation” (Black & Stone, 2005, pp. 243-244). In the retelling and reliving of this story, Nicole revealed her understanding that economic status, in addition to and in combination with, physical markers of race have the social power to separate. It also revealed her understanding that persons with privileges need to examine them and reduce their impact to create a space where persons without those privileges are welcomed and accepted.

³³ MWUnity is a pseudonym for a Greek Life sponsored retreat that focuses on issues of social justice.

³⁴ Scholars such as Asante, 1991; Case, 2012; Hartigan, 1997; Kendall, 2002; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lund, 2010; McCorkel and Myers, 2003; Fishkin, 1995; and Taylor, 2008.

Retelling and reliving the story of her Greek Life revealed that she has pondered a different Greek experience.

Sometimes I wonder what my life would be like if I went out for Sigmas. I just wonder what my Greek experience would have been like if I was with them.
(Nicole, research conversation, May 12, 2017)

Her wondering about living as a member of Sigma Psi Zeta, Inc., an Asian interest sorority, seems to be connected to a desire to live in spaces where she is represented, validated, and welcomed, and where she can create accepting, supportive relationships similar to those that she is accustomed to within her family.

While participating in the MWUnity social justice retreat Nicole came to a significant realization, or awakening, about her multiple and complex identities as she moves in and out of various contexts, spaces, and places.

I started to realize my entire life I've been splitting up. I have to be this here and this here and this there . . . [What] I didn't really realize until that moment was when I'm with my Caucasian family I'm Caucasian and when I'm with my Asian family I'm Asian, but then again there's an issue of I'm too white to be Asian; too Asian to be white. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

In my reflections upon this story fragment I was reminded of Lugones's (1987) description of "world" –travelling as "the shift from being one person to being a different person" (pp. 11-12). Nicole's story reflects this phenomenon of being a different person, having a different identity, in different "worlds." In the "world of her Caucasian family she *is* Caucasian. When she travels to the "world" of her Asian/Vietnamese family she *is* Asian. And, when she was in the "world" of the Vietnamese Student Association, again she *was* Asian, but when she was in the "world" of her sorority she *was* not Asian.

When I'm in VSA, we're all focused on Vietnamese culture, so I'm focusing on that. Then when I was in the sorority, focusing on Greek culture, so the Asian side was just kind of subdued . . . I'm still me, but . . . it's weird. I don't know

how to explain it exactly, just a kind of weird shift, I guess. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Her need to “world” –travel, to be a different person in different “worlds”, may be connected to the feeling of being placed in racial “boxes” by other people, such as when she perceives others judging her “*too white to be Asian; too Asian to be white*” (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016). People have frequently placed her in a Vietnamese “box” and disregard her other racial and ethnic heritages.

It's interesting too, because everyone always focuses on the minority, and no one's ever asked me, “Oh, tell me about the potato famine or Nazi Germany,” or like, “Oh, tell me about the British Empire,” because people think they know it, because it's in our history books, and [other] people are also mixed with being German, Irish, English . . . so just focusing on the minority. It's what people do. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2016)

Other times people placed her in a White or Caucasian “box” by dismissing her Asian/Vietnamese heritage.

I've gotten a lot of times when I was younger; I totally forget you're Asian. What does that mean? Like I'm supposed to be acting a certain way because I'm part Asian. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Alongside those “boxes” came an awakening that she had been placing herself in racial boxes by storying herself as half white and half Vietnamese.

It's interesting because no one ever thought I could be a mix. Like I have to fit cleanly into some category. Then MWU is when I'd just join a whole bunch of things and just expand my horizons and start realizing that throughout my entire life I'm saying, “Oh, I'm half Vietnamese, half white,” and then I was like, “Why am I saying I'm half? I'm a whole person.” That's when I was like; “I'm going to start saying I'm part because it doesn't split me up.” My thinking on it is half, it kind of puts me in the box again, like I'm half Vietnamese, half this. Part, there's really no measurement. Half and half just sounds really clean. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

As Nicole and I engaged in this conversation my thoughts returned to the “motherlands” section of her annal (see Figure 8), and I saw the multiplicity of identities represented in her maps of Germany, England, Ireland, and Vietnam.

As I'm looking at this graphic that you've made, if someone said to you, "What are you?" "I'm English, I'm German, I'm Irish, I'm Vietnamese, I'm lots of things" as opposed to saying "I'm half and half." "I'm a whole person."

Yeah, It's like a mix of different things. Something interesting, I just thought of this, how Irish and German were considered "other" once, my dad's grandma, her dad was German, her mom was Irish, and then her husband, his mother was Irish and his dad was German, so they were, I guess they could be mixed too.

(Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

Nicole is expressing an understanding that the concepts of race and ethnicity, and the placement of groups of people on the margins or in the center of society, shifts over time. In other words, race is a social construction (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In addition, it is a construction that often fails to consider the existence of persons with multiple racial heritages, as they do not fit neatly into “boxes”. Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, and Peck (2007) assert,

because society provides multiracial individuals with no easy answers about where they belong in terms of racial communities, multiracial individuals have been forced to come up with these answers on their own. Thus, they have to grapple with questions surrounding race that many monoracial individuals, both from majority and minority groups, have had answered for them by society. (p. 125)

Nicole's answer to this question is that she is not half Caucasian and half Vietnamese; she is part, part, part, and part, and the sum of those parts makes a whole person.

I'm not half anything. I'm a whole.

This is one of her college awakenings, and its prominence in her stories of college is evidenced by her placement of it as almost a title of that section of her annal (see Figure 14.2).

In my readings and re-readings of her story of this awakening I found myself returning multiple times to a particular phrase in the above story.

...no one ever thought I could be a mix.

Not only was her multiple racial heritages often unrecognized, when attending Colors of MWU, a three-day retreat focused on diversity and multiculturalism that was sponsored by the university's Office of Multicultural Affairs, she experienced the invisibility of multiracialness itself.

I realized, wow, I'm totally not represented in anything, especially Colors of MWU. We had to split up into racial caucuses; there was like white/Caucasian, African American, Asians, Hispanic, Latina, and then me. There was a couple mixed-raced children there and we were just like strategizing, like we had to split up and spend this amount of time here and then go here, and then we realized, wait, what are we doing? We could just make our own group.

So, even in that environment, Colors of MWU, there was no recognition that there are people who are more than one.

It was really strange.

(Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Faced with the realization that the university organization devoted to multicultural issues did not consider the existence of persons with multiple racial heritages in the planning and structure of the retreat, the multiracial individuals in attendance resisted the option of "splitting up", and instead, through their actions, proclaimed that they deserved to be recognized and represented with a group of their own. It seems that they were communicating that if society, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, must construct

racial categories then that construction is incomplete. This awareness, in part, led to the creation of MRMC.

I was like, “Why don’t we just make this an official organization? I feel so welcome, and a sense of love finally coming together.” We shared our experiences with the bigger group. It was just interesting to see how people were hurt. You have the Caucasian group who’s just like, “I feel like a bad person, because it’s my fault, I’m oppressing everyone else.” And then everyone else is like, “I’m feeling oppressed. Then we shared . . . happy go lucky, we finally found each other. Other groups are like, “It’s just hard to see you guys because we feel pain and you guys are happy.” I was like, “Well that’s because we haven’t had this before.” (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Nicole and the other multiracial students at the retreat created a space that had not existed before. I imagine that in that space they had a sensation something like Nicole’s “You get me!” experience with her friend, Alisha.

Nicole connected this experience with a project she had been assigned in one of her courses.

I was in a leadership class and I used it for my final project. The prompt was, “What are you going to do to make MWU community better?” (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

My leadership studies professor was great. She helped me forming MRMC. She was totally for it, and then kept asking all these questions, like “How’s your experience?” “What can I do to help you?” Wow! No one has paid this much attention before. (Nicole, research conversation, November 29, 2016)

She also connected her Colors of MWU experience with a message she received while attending LeaderShape³⁵;

Be the ripple that you want to see in the world so you can make a difference.

This resonated with her

You can go the distance; do whatever you want

³⁵ LeaderShape is a six-day institute that “challenges participants to lead with integrity while working towards a vision grounded in their deepest values” (Institute | Leadershape, 2015).

familial narrative. It also resonated with a familial narrative told by per paternal grandfather.

***Be a contributing member
of society***

My grandpa on my dad's side, he would always tell us, "Be contributing members of society. Do your best and get this done. I guess his parents said that as well, way back when. We're just really goal-oriented people, if we have something we want, we're going to work hard to get it. (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016)

And, the foundational importance of the *family first* narrative in Nicole's negotiations of her stories to live by around serving others permeates the following story fragment.

With all the organizations I joined, at MWU, and even now, I always find that connects me back to my family in a sense. So, like [this organization] where they pair international students with local students, kind of show them around, and make them feel at home. I was really interested, because my mom, and her entire side of the family, was in that situation when they came. So it was like being there for them, so it's still really grounded in my mom's experience. I just want to be that nice hand out helping people.

(Nicole, research conversation, March 10, 2017)

Upon coming to this point in the writing of this narrative account I felt compelled to pause and consider some of the ways Dewey's (1938/1997) principles of experience (interaction and continuity) as seen through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of sociality, temporality, and the notion of place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), are present in Nicole's stories of experience, particularly her experiences with Colors of MWU, LeaderShape, and her leadership class. By moving into and across these different contexts, or places, she entered into multiple social interactions that either bumped against or fit within her stories to live by and the stories to live by told and lived by her family. For example, the story told at Colors of MWU communicated a lack of space for persons with multiple racial heritages and the suggestion to "split" their time among

various groups forcefully bumped against her emerging personal story to live by of “I am a whole” person.

At the same time, the story told at LeaderShape combined with the support of her leadership class instructor fit with both the *you can go the distance* and the *be a contributing member of society* stories lived, told, retold, and relived within the social interaction of her family and within her personal stories to live by. These familial narratives are rooted in the temporality of experience as they have been passed from generation to generation to Nicole. The complexity of the interwoven quality of the principles of experience is clearly evident in Nicole’s experiences as she negotiated the composition of her stories to live by in light of the stories told by others.

Those complexities are apparent in the challenges she encountered during the creation of MRMC. The initial challenges revolved around the organizational and institutional aspects of forming a new student group on a university campus.

Our first few meetings were just a mess. I had no idea what I was doing. Nobody else who was at Colors MWU, who were kind of the temporary board members, had any idea what they were doing . . . It's kind of hard to have this group thrive where you don't know what the hell you're doing. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

In addition, the story Nicole composed around the purpose and tenor of MRMC came into tension with the stories that others seemed to have composed. Nicole was hoping to hold on to and expand upon the feelings of joy and belonging that arose in the multiracial group at Colors of MWU. In the composition of this story she may have been drawing upon the *family first* narrative that advocates “being there’ for each other through love and care.

My intentions were just starting out being social, like have the support system, and then from there we could grow it. What I saw was a lot of people were

happy that this group was forming and wanted to help out, and then some people that were there just treated it as a venting session, which wasn't necessarily my intention, because I just wanted to be happy we found each other. Let's not talk about all the crappy things people have done, even though yes, that's a problem. It was just this one individual in particular who just kept spewing hate and how he was just so angry at the world and everything. It was interesting, and it was also kind of hard because not everyone's experiences are the same, especially since everyone's mixed differently.

The only thing we had in common was that we were from MWU and that we're mixed. Everything else is just totally different.

I just wanted to create a safe space and what I had was just a hot mess.
(Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Yet, in the face of all these challenges, Nicole persevered; she had set a goal to create an organization that would make a positive contribution to the MWU community, and she accomplished that goal.

In Nicole's stories of MRMC I saw a breaking down of "you get me" because we both have multiple racial heritages. To a certain extent, living with multiple racial heritages in a society that often places people in monoracial "boxes" provides a space of connection. However, within MRMC, as people came into relationship around this commonality, and began to hear each other's stories, it quickly became apparent that they were telling multiple and complex stories that sometimes bumped against the stories told by others.

Nicole characterized her multiracial experience as "pleasant" in comparison to the experiences of others.

I never had anything hateful happen to me. It was just annoyances. No one's ever said anything . . .

No racist comments towards you?

In comparison, I guess my experience is pleasant, but no really hateful things, just ignorance, but nothing that would make me cry or anything, just more

annoying. If you keep [getting] hateful comments because people keep noticing this one aspect of you, I'm sure you're definitely going to be upset. Then my experience is probably why I cope better. I haven't had anything awful happen to me.

(Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

Nicole's "I'm not half anything. I'm a whole" story to live by also seemed to bump against the stories of racial identity told by other members of MRMC.

One thing I found interesting about what people were saying that were sharing their thoughts in MRMC is it always focused on their minority identity. No one ever talked about, well, not everyone was mixed with Caucasian, but those who were always focus on their minority, and it was interesting. I identify as part and part, but they more focused on being the minority. It seemed like they focused on the minority, because the minority has all the struggles and they're fighting for them, and typically white people have it a bit easier. It's just interesting that they ignored this part of themselves and just focus on another part . . . definitely not everyone's where I am and just still trying to work through things. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2016)

Nicole surmised that the focus on their minority identities was related to being nullified and a resultant need to advocate for the recognition of that part of their stories to live by.

A lot of people were angry about people nullifying identities. We're not represented, the mixed population's growing, but it's not very common, especially from my stance. Just a few years ago on commercials they started showing mixed families with mixed children, but they're usually African American. They're never part Asian, or Native American, or other groups we had in MRMC We just think of white and African American combining. We don't really see others, so we're not really comfortable with it I understand, it's frustrating when people only focus on one aspect of you; you're not just that one. You're an entire person. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Nicole has made efforts to understand the experiences and perspectives of those who fail to acknowledge and affirm racial identities,

I don't take offense easily. It's not people's fault; they're not supposed to automatically guess your whole background, your story, and so, just inform them. (November 26, 2016)...

But, she also understands the emotional toll of feeling nullified.

It does get tiring at times, because you're being constantly nullified. One part of you is completely ignored . . . I guess you just get fatigued trying to correct people. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Although Nicole told several stories around trying to understand those who don't understand her, and her efforts to take control of her reactions to the behavior of others, this brief story fragment expresses that she still feels frustration and an internal tension when confronting ignorance and nullification on the part of others. These emotions seem to be connected to her experiential understanding that there is no single story of being multiracial, no single story of being Vietnamese, no single story of being white, no single story of being. Nicole wants to live and tell a story that reflects her wholeness not a story that fractionalizes her into halves.

Stories of Nursing School

During Nicole's junior year at MWU, the same year she was working to create MRMC, she decided to transfer to a small nursing college in a neighboring state to complete her bachelor's degree in nursing. This decision was in no way connected to the bumpings, tensions, and challenges involved with MRMC. It was, instead, a response to a longing to experience life in a new and different place.

I've always wanted to leave [my home state], not because I hate [it], but just I know there's more out there. I just want to see so many different things. It's been a really good decision. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

However, her strong connections to home and family tempered that desire.

When I was applying to different places I decided that I'm going out of state. I got into quite a few, and then I realized, oh, that's really far. [I'm] only about three hours away. I'm still getting out and seeing other things. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Even though she was able to stay geographically close enough to make regular trips home to be with family, she had to let go of MRMC.

It was really hard because it was like my little baby and my brainchild It's tough definitely because I want to see this group thrive It's hard. Kind of the same thing with VSA, I'm not really part of the group, but I'm still in contact with everyone I was part of these groups and they're growing, and I want to see them be successful. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Although the change of place involved sacrifices, Nicole told of being pleased with her choice because of the strength and structure of the academic program at her new school.

My classes are small so I get to know my instructors and peers, which is really helpful in the healthcare system, because you need to know your team, how to work together. I have small class sizes. I can actually practice the skills I've been taught like putting in IVs. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

However, as she moved into this new experience some aspects of it reminded her of a less comfortable time of her life.

It's like I went all the way back to middle school again. People focusing on one aspect, like I had a girl who's really nice and we worked together on a nursing project. I told her I was part Vietnamese and she was like, "Oh my gosh!" I love your food, and she starts rattling on about how she gets her nails done by Vietnamese women. She asked me if my family members were in the nail business, and some of them are. She was like, "I knew it." In that moment I was kind of upset, like angry that they lived up to that stereotype, that's so annoying, but people have to make a living. They're artistic, and money was an issue so they couldn't go to university and pursue art and so they do it on nails. People's ignorance kind of annoys me, and they're set in the [idea], "Oh all Vietnamese people do nails". (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

This story returned my thoughts to the impact of telling and believing a single story about a people; a single story "creates stereotype and the problem with stereotype is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make the one story the only story" (Adichie, 2009, n.p.). The problem is not that the girl told a story of Vietnamese women as nail technicians; but that it is the only story she knew to tell. It is a story that has become so pervasive in the U.S. consciousness that the many other true stories of the work life of persons with Vietnamese heritage have been excluded.

After finding the accepting and welcoming social context of the Vietnamese Student Association at MWU, Nicole found the reemergence of a single story of her Vietnamese heritage frustrating and annoying. But, more than that, she realized that this story places her family members, and all persons of Vietnamese heritage who “do nails” for a living, in an inferior position socially.

It's just some of my family happens to do nails and they're really good at it. I was just kind of upset because the way people look at it is kind of looking down on people who do nails because they're literally at your feet . . . “Oh, you're doing nails, you're not college educated.” I was just mad that yes, that's true, they do nails, but Vietnamese people are more than just doing nails. (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

Adichie (2009) recognized that social positioning is an aspect of the telling of a single story, because “how they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power” (n.p.). Adichie goes on to explain, “power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (n.p.), in other words to make it the single story. The creation of a single story puts the teller in a position of power and marginalizes the object of the story. The image of a nail technician “literally at your feet” serves to bring the impact of that marginalization from the realm of the abstract into physical embodiment.

Another stereotype that Nicole has found herself dealing with throughout her life is that of the Asian model minority. According to Zhang (2010), prior to the 1960s Asians were “viewed as a yellow blight upon the land . . . [and] were once legally excluded and disenfranchised” (p. 23). Since the 1960s, the media has frequently portrayed Asians as a model minority in comparison to other minority populations, and “are typically represented . . . as overachievers who were intelligent, industrious, technologically savvy, mathematically talented, self-disciplined, self-sufficient, and law-

abiding” (Zhang, 2010, p. 24). The adoption of this belief on the part of Nicole’s peers often resulted in the diminishment of her personal accomplishments.

When I do well it’s because, “Oh, you’re Asian”. I studied, I worked hard; it’s not because of that. Not every Asian is a genius that can do things easily. We’re just like everyone else. We have to work hard, but, just, the model minority again. People focus on that, because that’s what they’ve been told, so it must be true It dismisses the hard work I did. (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016)

Zhang (2010) asserts, “the general public seems to accept the stereotype as a social reality . . . [however] the public endorsement of the stereotype is by no means an indication of its validity” (p. 32). Yet, the lack of validity does not dissuade the adoption of the stereotype even by those whose lives and experiences push against it. As Adichie (2009) explained, “show a people as one thing, only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become” (n.p.), not only in the eyes of others, but often in their own eyes.

Several times you talked about, in relation to school, that people thought, “Oh, you’re Asian so you must be a genius.” I’m wondering does the model minority view happen mostly in school, or does it happen in other settings?

I’ve mostly seen it in school, but it just happened recently. I went out to lunch with my friend, who’s also Vietnamese, and I was trying to figure out the tip and math hasn’t been my strong suit. I was trying to do it in my head, but I wanted to make sure so I had to take out my calculator. My friend’s like, “Oh, finally an Asian who doesn’t know how to do math like me.” Even amongst the community, it’s a common expectation. You see it all over the place, but definitely mostly in school.

(Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016)

When Nicole first met this friend she was unaware of Nicole’s part Vietnamese heritage; the discovery surprised her.

I met a girl who was from Vietnam. Before she found out she added me on Instagram and she was looking through my pictures and she came across this picture of me and my family at a wedding. My caption for the picture is “Told you I was Viet.” She was like, “Say what?” I was like, “Yep, I’m half,” I just

say “half” when people don’t know me, make it easier on them. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2016)

Although they bonded over their shared heritage, it is evident from Nicole’s graphic annal (see Figure 14.2) that she experienced feelings of ambivalence around this relationship. Once again, having to explain herself and her racial heritages likely brought forth feelings of annoyance and frustration. However, being able to connect with someone who shared her Vietnamese heritage provided a small space of social support that did not widely exist in her new place of living and learning.

Going to nursing school . . . it’s very rural and farm-like, so I don’t know if they had much exposure . . . to diversity. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

Also, I’ve run into this too, they’re asking, “Oh, where are you from?” I was like [a Midwestern city], and they kind of looked at me. Then I realized, “They don’t believe me.” I think it’s interesting how people are still stuck in how, “People from here are supposed to look like this and that,” and when you see someone who goes against it, they’re just, “No, that can’t be.” Why would I lie about something like that? (Nicole, research conversation, March 10, 2017)

In response, my thoughts turned to these words of Adichie’s (2009),

I’ve always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging all of the stories of that place and that person.

Nicole’s Graphic Annal

I now turn to the Nicole’s graphic annal (see Figures 14.1 and 14.2) as a metaphorical representation of the course of her life (Huber et al., 2012), and her stories to live by that she has composed and recomposed throughout her life. The stories of Nicole’s experiences told in this narrative account have, in many situations, reflected her reliance upon the narratives lived, told, relived and retold within her family across generations.

Family first
Make your own decisions
Education is important
Why limit yourself?
You can't control them;
you can control how you react
You can go the distance
Be a contributing member of society
Do whatever you want.

These narratives are represented in the pictures Nicole drew of her “motherlands,” thus connecting her to the familial stories to live by passed to her across generations. These motherlands live within her even if she has never physically traveled there. Also, the Midwestern state where much of her family lives, and where she grew up is also, in effect, a “motherland”.

Figure 14.1. Nicole's Graphic Annal (Part 1)

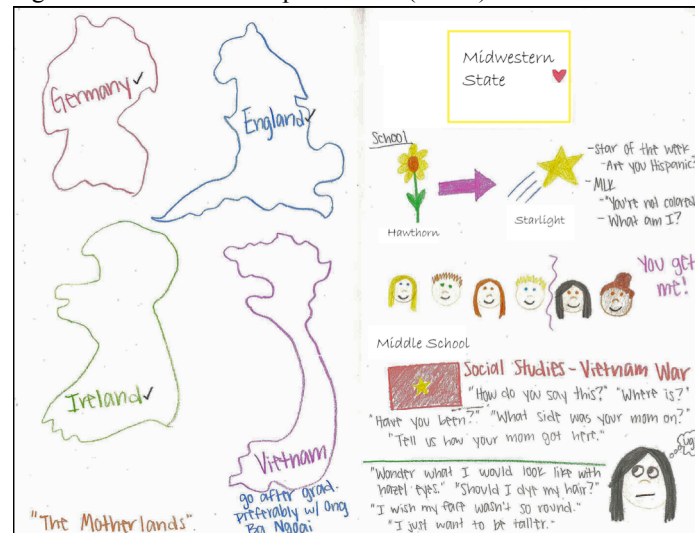


Figure 14.1. Nicole's graphic representing significant events, memories and experiences.

Here's a picture of [Midwestern State] and a little heart, because that's where I'm from; it's home sweet home. I put a heart. It's just where I really felt like I belonged. (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017)

You've talked about this desire to move beyond, and that's one of the reasons you've gone [to nursing college] . . . So, I started thinking, has [Midwestern State] become a motherland for you?

Yeah.

And, you have this great affection for all of your motherlands . . . you have this connection to people through these physical places.

Mm-hmm.

(Nicole, research conversation, March 10, 2017)

I came to see the idea of being connected to places, “motherlands,” intimately intertwined with her relationships with family.

Figure 14.2. Nicole's Annal (Part 2)

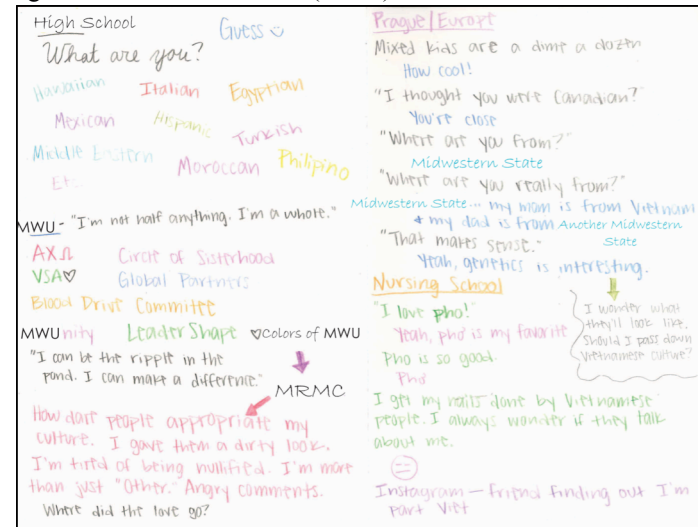


Figure 14.2. Nicole's graphic representing of significant events, memories and experiences.

Your family, your immediate family, your extended family, the people in your family and families, that's really a motherland.

Yeah, I'd say so.

(Nicole, research conversation, March 10, 2017)

The familial narratives told by her parents and grandparents are connected to all of these places and they ground her to feelings of care, love, and

belonging. As Nicole travels out and away from family into schools and other social contexts she brings her familial narratives with her.

When faced with challenging situations in those other contexts, Nicole looks to her relationships with family members and the familial narratives they have told and lived, as a source of guidance and a place of safety. When faced with tensions around the competitive environment of Starlight Elementary, Nicole looked to the *education is important* narratives in the composition of her own story to live by, *I'm not a competitive person really at all; Just do well*. When questioned about her racial heritage by a second grade peer, when frustrated by the tendency of teachers and peers to focus primarily upon her Vietnamese heritage, when positioned as a definitive voice of Vietnamese people, and when made the object of a single story, Nicole turned to her family for guidance and

began to live the familial narrative, *you can't control them, you can control how you react*. When creating a friend group in a middle school environment where her physical appearance was different from the majority of her peers, she looked to the familial narrative. *Why limit yourself? Be open to options and different experiences*. When faced with the challenges of forming MRMC, she turned to the familial narratives, *you can go the distance and be a contributing member of society*. In all of these situations, Nicole turned to her family “motherland” and lived the *family first* narrative.

While this annal is in many ways a graphic representation of her relationships with others as she moved from place to place, it also represents her changing relationship with herself and her efforts to compose stories to live by. As a young child in elementary school she struggled to answer the “What am I?” question. Even though she could give the answer that she was half white and half Vietnamese, she didn’t understand where she fit within the stories told around her. By the time she reached high school she found humor in the stories others composed about her racial heritage and the fact that they were never correct. During this time she was still storying herself as half and half, even though sometimes she felt too white to be Asian and too Asian to be white. In college, she reached a point where she was able to compose a new story to live by that answers the “What are you?” questions posed by others and the “What am I?” question she asked herself.

I'm not half anything. I'm a whole.

She came to see herself as a person made up of parts and in combination those parts make a whole person. In response, I wondered,

It sounds to me like you're saying, "Well, I'm this and I'm this, but I'm always both at the same time."

Yeah

Can you tell me a little more about that?

I kind of just see myself as a puzzle. Things just fit together. You have different parts of a puzzle, but all together it makes a whole puzzle. It's just hard splitting up your identities.

(Nicole, research conversation, May 12, 2017)

College was a time of awakening for Nicole, a time to explore new places, spaces, and relationships.

It seems like at MWU is when you really started to create community for yourself, and within those created communities you started composing your own story. Sometimes those stories . . . pushed against what other people's stories were about you.

People's perception of me was just like, this is what you think, but I'm going to show you what is actually going on with me right now.

(Nicole, research conversation, March 10, 2017)

This was a time to move away from the found communities of elementary school, middle school, and high school, and explore chosen communities. A chosen community, according to Lindemann Nelson (2001) is a “voluntary association”, one in which the members may compose a “*counterstory*—a story that resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect (Lindemann Nelson, 1995)” (p. 6). Within chosen communities such as MWUnity, Colors of MWU, MRMC, Greek Life, and LeaderShape Nicole composed a story to live by around race that counters the stories told by many other people in her life. For Nicole, the story of being a whole person commands more respect than a story of a person made up of halves.

Chapter 7: Composing Stories to Live By in Liminal Spaces

In the *Living the Narrative Inquiry* section within Chapter 3, I wrote about moving from the “first level of analysis . . . [to the] . . . second level of analysis” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132), from the analysis of field texts and the writing of narrative accounts to the process of discerning resonant threads. This required that I shift my view to look across the stories of participants by laying “the accounts metaphorically alongside one another . . . [to see] resonances or echoes that reverberated across accounts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132). I returned to each account separately while holding the others in my mind, allowing them to work on me (Morris, 2001), allowing them to help me discern plotlines that reverberate across the narratives. This chapter is the expression of that second level of analysis.

A Look Back

There was a moment in time when I stood metaphorically between these levels of analysis. I found it necessary to take a look back on the living of the narrative inquiry and the writing of the narrative accounts before I could envision the way forward. I again looked to the research puzzle—the possible connections between experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages and the composition of their stories to live by—that has guided this inquiry. I recalled the first level of analysis in which I looked at participants’ stories of experience, told in bits and pieces (Downey & Clandinin, 2010), through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which is grounded primarily in Dewey’s (1938/1997) theory of experience. I did this not “to reassemble the bits but rather to enter the strewn bits of a person’s life in the midst and in relational ways, attending to what is possible in understanding the temporal, social,

and place dimensions within an ongoing life” (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 391). This required an orientation of “thinking *with* stories [as opposed to] . . . the institutionalized Western practice of thinking *about* stories”³⁶ (Morris, 2001, p. 55). As I composed the narrative accounts I endeavored to enter into the stories told by participants, allowed them to work on me. The composing of the narrative accounts involved writing, rewriting, and writing again while reminding myself to “focus one eye on stories lived and told and the other on the stories and lives that live at their edges” (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 392). Stories are nested (Clandinin, 2013, p. 22) within other stories. They mingle with, are shaped by, and shape other stories. Stories are not discrete, stand-alone entities; no one story of a person’s life can be parsed out and made separate.

After this reflection I turned my gaze forward, and brought this same orientation into the looking across and the discerning of resonant threads.

Discerning Narrative Threads

I saw that participants often told of feeling they did not fit in their social environments, as when Maylynn told of not fully fitting in either the black community or the white community, when Breanna told of wanting to fit in with her white peers even as some of them teased and bullied her about her Asian features, and when Nicole told of feeling too Asian when she was with her white family and too white when she was with her Asian family. These stories reminded me of Heilbrun’s (1999) notion of being in a state of liminality, a state in which a person finds herself “betwixt and between, neither altogether here nor there, not one kind of a person or another, not this, not that”

³⁶ Morris (2001) differentiated thinking *with* stories from thinking *about* stories in this way.

Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinker and object of thought are at least theoretically distinct. Thinking *with* stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as take the radical step back, almost a return to childhood experience, of allowing narrative to work on us. (p. 55)

(Heilbrun, 1999, p. 8). Heilbrun (1999) explained, “to be in a state of liminality is to be poised on uncertain ground, [and] . . . the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 3). Liminality is created through experiences that bring a sense that one’s stories to live by do not fit within a new understanding of the world.

Heilbrun (1999) uses the metaphor of a threshold to try to capture what she intends by liminality as she writes of the “threshold experience” (p. 3) as a space of transition. For Heilbrun (1999), in spaces of liminality, “we are always on that threshold, always in between, never accepting the old or quite succeeding in establishing the new” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 66). Thinking narratively, liminality involves a dimension of temporality, a backward and forward movement in which we are always being and becoming, always composing and recomposing stories to live by, as we come into relationship with others and ourselves across time and contexts. In looking across narrative accounts, I saw Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole composing their stories to live by in liminal spaces.

For Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole, experiences of liminality brought struggles for what David Carr calls narrative coherence, “a struggle with two aspects . . . one to live out or live up to a plan or narrative . . . the other to construct or choose that narrative” (Carr, 1986, p. 96). Caine et al., (2013) explained that narrative coherence is not “the orderly linking together of experiences into a neat chronological frame. Instead, it arises . . . as we seek to compose ourselves in relation” (p. 570). I see narrative coherence as the fitting together of stories to live by that make sense next to each other

and clarify the answer to the question, “Who am I?” in relation to others and ourselves. It is a recurring struggle that “is concerned with the past in order to render it coherent with or comprehensible in terms of a present and a future” (Carr, 1986, p. 75). We are always struggling for narrative coherence, sometimes we succeed and sometimes not.

I noticed that experiences of liminality and struggles for narrative coherence looked different in different contexts and around different people. As I thought about these complexities, I discerned five resonant threads, or plotlines, that echoed across the three narrative accounts that involve the composition and recomposition of their stories to live by: (1) within familial narratives; (2) in spaces where race is constructed; (3) within school stories; (4) in spaces of invisibility; and (5) within intergenerational familial narratives. While I discerned five threads, the threads were interwoven and I pulled gently to try to show the places where they overlapped and intertwined. While there were resonances with all three participants across the five threads, I have chosen to highlight two participants in four of the five threads and all three participants in one thread.

Thread 1: Composing Their Stories to Live By within Familial Narratives

Familial narratives are stories lived and told within families and sometimes lived and told across generations. They are stories of being in relationship with each other, of philosophies, beliefs, and values, and of visions of the world outside the family. Familial narratives are also stories of family histories across generations that situate family members both temporally and contextually in family life. Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole’s stories of experience and stories to live by are nested within, connected to, and shaped by familial narratives. They each experienced moments of liminality or uncertainty as familial narratives around being and becoming *different* bumped against

their stories to live by as they struggled to compose and recompose narrative coherence. In this thread I have chosen to highlight Maylynn and Breanna.

Maylynn's intergenerational stories of family included stories of her Yaya's (her paternal grandmother's) childhood and early adulthood experiences in neglectful and abusive relationships. Yaya left home to join the army at the age of 18, and later took herself and her son away from an alcoholic and abusive husband. These stories bring forth a narrative of *survival through self-transformation*; she transformed from being a civilian to being a member of the military and from being a married person to being a divorced person.

When Yaya saw Maylynn struggling during elementary school because of lack of attention from teachers and racist jokes and comments from her peers, Yaya drew upon her *survival through self-transformation* narrative that she composed for herself as she made sense of her lived experiences. She relived and retold her stories to live by in her decision that Maylynn should straighten her hair so she would "look like a white girl" (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016). Maylynn told of Yaya's belief, "if we make her a little less black looking then she might get treated better, not only by her classmates, but she might . . . get more help from teachers if she looks less nappy" (Maylynn, research conversation, November 8, 2016). Yaya was telling Maylynn to transform herself, to change her physical appearance, in order to fit in and survive within her school context.

There are many complexities living within this story of Yaya's decision that her light-skinned granddaughter should attempt to pass for white, which is to present oneself as, or allow others to story you as, white. Freedom from oppression and discrimination,

along with advantages and privileges given to those storied by others as white, have, since the Jim Crow Era, led people of color to tell and live this story (Hobbs, 2014; Wormser, 2003). One can see Yaya's decision as an expression of her love for Maylynn; it was a response to her concerns around Maylynn's academic and social experiences. It might also be a manifestation of internalized racism, which "is all about the cultural imperialism, the domination, the structure, the normalcy of the 'way things are' in our racialized society" (Speight, 2007, p. 129). Within Maylynn's experience of elementary school, it was normal to have straight hair; it was not normal to have kinky hair, and Yaya likely understood that. Beginning at the age of eight, Maylynn lived out the story of straight hair. Her hair was chemically straightened, and each weekend Maylynn visited her Yaya to have her hair washed, conditioned, and straightened with a hot iron. Living this story of passing bumped against the racist stories told by her peers through "jokes" that communicate to Maylynn that she did not fit. Maylynn understood, "jokes reveal more truth than anything else" (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016).

Just prior to entering her eighth grade year, Maylynn's family moved to what she storied as a relatively less conservative community, where her teachers and peers were more accepting of diversity. She felt she fit in to a greater degree, and "was better allowed to express myself . . . I could find my identity easier . . . as I was allowed to speak without fear of persecution" (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017). Maylynn had been living out a story composed by Yaya that required her to present herself "more like a white girl". Maylynn pushed against the *transformation for survival narrative*; it was a story that fit Yaya's life, not Maylynn's life in this new context. But being in a new environment created a space of liminality for Maylynn. She was in some

ways, betwixt and between, finding the spaces in which she lived on unsteady ground. She no longer had to live the familial narrative told by Yaya, but she was uncertain about what stories to live by that would allow her more authentic self-expression. Carr (1986) explained, “authenticity is not a matter of this or that social role . . . it consists rather in the recognition that, whatever the role, it is I who choose it” (p. 93). To live a new and more authentic story, one that would perhaps offer her more narrative coherence, Maylynn chose a role for herself, as she worked to compose new stories to live by; she stopped straightening her hair, and during her high school and college years, she also limited her use of cosmetics, and discontinued shaving her body hair.

Breanna’s family stories also include a narrative in which to fit in one needs to modify oneself. This narrative began within the silences around race created by her parents. They lived and told a familial narrative of racial colorblindness by saying, “we’re the same” (Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2017), and race does not matter. As Breanna entered her middle and high school years, she came to an increasing awareness that race did matter in the social contexts beyond her home. Breanna experienced many moments of liminality within the bumpings of familial narratives and school narratives around race. Breanna’s world of “race does not matter” and “we are all the same” did not exist outside her home. To be “the same” as others within her school contexts, she needed to make modifications to herself. In an attempt to achieve narrative coherence, to live out (Carr, 1986) her stories of “I thought I was white” and “I just wanted to be white” (Breanna, research conversations, November 7, 2016), she used makeup, introduced to her by her mother with a comment that it made her pretty, in an attempt to make her eyes appear larger like her white peers. Breanna composed a story to

live by that allowed her to try to fit into her white social environment; she silenced her Korean heritage.

Breanna stories her mother as a person who has a strong personality, who was outgoing, fun, and popular in high school. Seeing that Breanna was quiet, shy, and struggling socially in school, she (like Maylynn's grandmother) drew upon her own stories to live by, and urged Breanna to modify herself by being more vocal and outgoing, by joining the band, and by wearing makeup and nail polish. The narrative that Breanna's mother attempted to create for Breanna to live out (Carr, 1986) based on her childhood experiences bumped against Breanna's stories to live by of being introspective, quiet, shy, and a lover of literature who liked to find, "the smallest little nook . . . and . . . curl up there . . . [with] a book" (Breanna, research conversation, November 28, 2016). Breanna experienced liminality as she experienced her mother's admonitions that Breanna should set aside her stories to live by and modify herself to better fit within the social contexts of school. Breanna was lost in an "abyss" (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 52), not knowing how to negotiate the bumpings of these two stories.

Breanna expressed deep anger and resentment toward her mother in relation to feeling criticized and devalued via the stories of self-modification to fit in. For Breanna, living out this narrative not only involved changing her personality and physical appearance, but also modifying her heritage from Korean to American. Yet, she willingly engaged in activities she did not care for—playing sports and watching science fiction—in hopes of forging a closer relationship with her father, only to see her father's attention focused on his relationship with Breanna's brother. Breanna came to realize that self-modification did not result in being accepted or fitting in with others who occupied her

social contexts. It only served to create self-alienation, where she felt less and less narrative coherence.

Her struggle in which she felt less and less able to achieve narrative coherence created experiences of not being “at ease” (Lugones, 1987) within her familial “world” (Lugones, 1987). As I reflected, I saw Breanna’s dis/ease in many situations. Breanna expressed love for her parents, and, as an adult, attempted to come to an understanding of her mother’s actions and motives, but she does not “treasure” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016) her family. I cannot say that there is a lack of love, but there does seem to be a lack of connection, especially with her mother. Breanna recognized that, to some degree, her difficult relationship with her mother, “was just a normal part of the teenage years” (Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2018). However, Breanna storied their relationship as more troubled than that, “you cannot deny the underlying inner turmoil I was facing . . . I needed someone to turn to and my mother could not be that person” (Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2018). She had no one within her familial “worlds” with whom she could share her emotions. Breanna storied her self as being “depressed . . . stressed” (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016), and felt her mother, “expects me to be perfect. It makes me hate myself” (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016). These tensions may have contributed to Breanna’s binge eating; the National Eating Disorder Association (2018) reports, “low self-esteem . . . having to follow the rules, and concerns about mistakes . . . [and] depression” (para. 6-7) are linked to the development of eating disorders.

Even though Breanna shared a “daily history” (Lugones, 1987) with members of her family, the silences created by her parents around race made it impossible for her to

feel that her parents shared in her cultural history and created a familial world in which Breanna felt less and less “at ease” Her family’s norms around race, the narratives that say, “I don’t see any race. I see who you are” seems to be a significant source of Breanna’s dis/ease in her familial “world”. This narrative seems to have punctuated, rather than eased, the racial differences between her and other members of her family. As she matured into a young adult, she came to see this narrative as a “problem statement, because regardless of whether your parent sees your race, you know, the entire society, the entire world sees your race” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016).

This lack of “ease” within Breanna’s familial “world” became a liminal space for her and she continued to struggle to compose narrative coherence for herself (Carr, 1986, p. 96). For much of her life, Breanna attempted to live out and live up to (Carr, 1986) narratives composed by others. To achieve narrative coherence, one must also compose those narratives. It was leaving home for college, to a place where her mother could not control her (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016), that allowed her to find a space where she could more fully engage in her struggle for narrative coherence, and occasionally experienced narrative coherence. She shifted from storying herself as white, to struggling to compose stories to live by as Korean, and then recomposing her racial stories to live by as both white and Korean.

The composing of Maylynn and Breanna’s stories to live by were nested within a familial narrative of making themselves different in order to fit with their social contexts. They both lived out (Carr, 1986) this narrative for a period of time, however the living of this narrative bumped against their stories to live by creating experiences of liminality. They struggled for narrative coherence, but as they entered new contexts (for Maylynn a

less conservative school and for Breanna moving to college) they were able to push back against this familial narrative and achieve greater narrative coherence.

Thread 2: Composing Their Stories to Live By in Spaces Where Race is Constructed

To speak about composing stories to live by in spaces where race is constructed, I first speak to the concept of race. The trouble is there is no agreed upon definition of race, although it is increasingly accepted that race is a social construction (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Mahiri (2017) defined race as a “socially constructed idea that humans can be divided into distinct groups based on inborn traits that differentiate them from members of other groups” (p.2). Mahiri (2017) went on to assert, “scientists have demonstrated there is no physical existence of race” (p. 2). Placing Mahiri’s definition of race as a social construction next to his assertion that race does not exist biologically might lead one to conclude that bodies are separate from the construction of race. However, Veninga (2009) noted “the crucial difference between the significance of the body and (ir)relevance of biological science” (p. 114). The particularities of our bodies, such as skin tone, facial features, hair color and texture, are markers of racialized stories, there is a “relationship between the materiality of the body and discursive construction of race” (Veninga, 2009, p. 108).

Narratives of race include elements of national origin and physical appearance. Collins (2004) pointed out, “ancestral origins in many cases have a correlation, albeit often imprecise, with self-identified race or ethnicity” (p. S13). It is important to note that the correlation is between ancestry and *self-identification*. In other words, our familial ancestry can shape the stories we tell about ourselves around race. Narratives of race also involve shifting and imprecise understandings of what it means in varied social contexts

to be a member of a particular racial group, and are complicated by issues of being white, being black, or being Asian, generally associated with the genetics of our bodies (Alexander, 2004), and whiteness, blackness, or Asian-ness.

As I wrote in chapter four, Alexander (2004) drew upon Judith's Butler's theory of gender performativity in his understanding of whiteness as something that is performed in the world and linked to privilege. Hartigan (1997) defines whiteness as "a structural position of social power and privilege" (p. 496), and it stands in opposition to blackness, "where whiteness grows as a seemingly 'natural' proxy for quality, merit, and advantage, and 'color' disintegrates to embody deficit or 'lack'" (Fine, 1997, p. 58). Alexander (2004) argues that whiteness is distinct from being white, and one can perform whiteness even when living in a "non-white" body. To story whiteness and blackness in this way is to think of them not as whether one is able to pass the paper bag test (having skin color lighter than a brown paper bag), but as stories to live by.

As I looked across the narrative accounts of Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole I discerned a resonant thread around the social construction of race. Each of them frequently told stories of how others racially categorized them, of the impact of race on their personal interactions and relationships, and of how they composed and recomposed their stories to live by around race. In this thread I have highlighted Breanna and Nicole.

During Breanna's early childhood years, her primary social interactions were in the context of her white, middle class, suburban family, a place where there were no conversations about her Asian heritage, her siblings' African American heritage, or society's dominant stories of race. Even though she looked physically different from her white parents, their familial narrative of *we are all the same*, and the silences around race

in her home, shaped how Breanna composed her stories to live by around race. She storied herself as white (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). I am reminded of Twine's (1997) study of 16 multiracial women of African-descent who all identified as white prior to entering college. Twine (1997) noted, "racial 'neutrality' as an ideological condition necessary to acquiring a white identity" (p. 222). For example, one participant in that study "had never [been] told [by her mother] that she belonged to the black racial category or any other racial group" (Twine, 1997, pp. 222-223). Similarly, Breanna's parents told her a story of "I see you for you. I don't see race" (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). This brings me to an understanding that Breanna composed a story of herself as white because of her experiences within her family. It seems quite likely that, through living with her parents, she learned to perform whiteness.

Breanna lacked experiential knowledge of the dominant social narratives that categorize and discriminate based on physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, color and texture of hair, and body structure. As she moved into social contexts beyond her family, such as school, she began to realize that others saw her through racial categories unfamiliar to her. By looking at her physical characteristics, her peers and teachers categorized her as Asian, and her peers told her stories of her Asianness, such as eating dogs for dinner (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016), that were often based on single story (Adichie, 2009) stereotypes. These stories of her as Asian bumped against her stories to live by around race, that is, stories in which she named herself white and had learned to perform whiteness. She was choosing a story of

whiteness, while others were imposing a story of Asianness. She found this imposed story of Asianness difficult to live out (Carr, 1986).

Breanna experienced moments of liminality as her stories to live by of being white and performing whiteness repeatedly bumped against stories told by others that named her Asian. The uncertainties and unsteadiness she felt in this liminal space are vividly present in this story fragment, “I hated being Asian so much . . . I just wanted to be white [like my friends]” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). She wanted to continue to live out (Carr, 1986) the stories lived and told within her family contexts. She pushed back against the story of her as Asian. She told stories of being “firmly white” through middle school and high school as she changed her physical appearance through the use of makeup in an attempt to make her outward appearance fit her stories to live by. Her decision to use cosmetics to make her eyes appear larger was surrounded by dominant stories of white beauty. According to Johnson (2016), “women get a very strong message that our value depends deeply on our attractiveness . . . only white women are beautiful” (para. 1), and white beauty includes eyes that, “look as European as possible” (para. 6). The wearing of cosmetics, primarily to change the appearance of her eyes from Asian to white, may have been part of her struggle for narrative coherence, to live out (Carr, 1986) her chosen story of being white. She may have also been attempting to live up to (Carr, 1986) her mother’s story of Breanna being pretty when she had makeup on her face. Her strained relationship with her mother adds to the complexity of her experiences of this liminal space. It is not only about stories to live by around race; it may also be about seeking acceptance and validation from her mother.

Through the teasing and bullying during her middle school years, Breanna felt she was forced to take on a story of being Asian while she was simultaneously shunning her Korean-ness. This “imposition of racial identity” (Jones, 2015, para. 54) collided with her white stories to live by. Breanna’s story of her Korean heritage as something to be shunned began to shift with the discovery of Korean dramas and music. She found them and the Korean language interesting and intriguing (Breanna, research conversation, December 21, 2016); she wanted to learn more. She entered college with a desire to be Korean, but she still identified as white.

In her new contexts of college, Breanna experienced being named Asian as a positive storying of her, “in Korean class ... they all loved me That was the first time I felt like being Korean is something good, something to be proud of” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). In this context, the social meaning of being Korean shifted. Rather than being disparaged by her peers, it was celebrated. She felt the possibility of composing and living out (Carr, 1986) new stories to live by, however, she “had no idea” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016) how. She, “felt like people were always suspicious of me not being Asian . . . I couldn’t be Asian I was pretty much ignorant. I grew up . . . white” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). This sense of not knowing how to recompose her stories to live by around race created a space of liminality, and in her struggle for narrative coherence she asked herself, “How do I be Korean?” (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017).

Breanna came to understand that even though others storied her as Asian/Korean, the only way she could actually *be* Korean was to *experience* and *do* Korean. She needed to learn to live Korean culture. She needed to perform Korean-ness. Drawing on the work

of Judith Butler, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) explain that performativity is a “process of *repetition* that produces . . . subjectivity. This repetition is not a performance *by* a person, but a performativity that *constitutes* a subject” (p. 67). Breanna needed to, through repetition, immerse herself in the Korean culture, and come to a point where speaking Korean, eating Korean food, travelling to Seoul, were not just actions, but integral and constitutive to a recomposing of her stories to live by around race. Her college life was a time of being “betwixt and between” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 8) as she struggled to live her white stories to live by and compose Korean/Asian stories to live by. She told a story of devoting her “whole college life to trying to get in [to the Asian culture] to learn about those things and fit in entirely” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). She found that she was not able to compose and live out (Carr, 1986) that story, but through those experiences she was able to say, “I’m both” (Breanna, research conversation, March 16, 2017).

For Breanna, experiences of liminality—uncertainty, unsteadiness, and confusion—in relation to her stories around race, which began during her elementary school years and continued through middle school, high school, and college, continue to shape the composition of her stories to live by. She has, to some extent, been able to find more narrative coherence by composing stories to live by that include her Korean-ness and being Korean. However, as we concluded the inquiry, she expressed,

I am still very much in the process of figuring myself out, and I don’t actually know if I ever will. That is, in the sense that I don’t know if I will ever feel completely at home in one culture/identity, even in that which is my own personal blend of Korean and white. (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018)

Nicole told stories of living within a conception of race as distinct categories when she experienced others' need to place her in a metaphorical racial "box"; but her physical characteristics often led them to misidentify, or choose the wrong box. The possibility that she might be Vietnamese, or that she might have more than one racial heritage, was frequently not present as people attempted to compose stories about her racial heritage. Veninga (2009) explained, "racial identities are not always automatically ascribed to particular bodies in a predetermined fashion, but rather are often worked through as both conscious and unconscious attempt to fit in to a particular social realm" (p. 108). Nicole storied this situation as, "interesting because no one ever thought I could be a mix. . . . Like I have to fit cleanly into some category" (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017).

In some situations, when people were unsure about her racial heritage, they asked her, "What are you?" She experienced this question as objectifying her. It is designed to help the person asking the questions ascertain where she fits within the dominant narratives of race. It is a question about her being-ness in relation to race. The answer they are looking for is the name of a racial "box". When people have become aware of her multiple racial heritages they frequently focus on her Vietnamese culture by sharing what they know about the Vietnam War, Vietnamese food, or the single story (Adichie, 2009) of Vietnamese women as nail technicians, again attempting to place her in a racial box of singularity.

These efforts have nullified her multiple racial identities (white, Asian, and mixed) creating an experience of liminality for her that was often accompanied by feelings of frustration and annoyance. Her experience at the Colors of MWU retreat

awakened her to experiences of liminality as she realized that even the Office of Multicultural Affairs seemed to construct race in singular terms. Through being asked to place herself in one or another racial caucus during the retreat, she realized that by storying herself as half and half she had been “splitting” herself to fit into this dominant story of race as singular. She explained it in this way, “My thinking on it is half, it kind of puts me in the box again, like I’m half Vietnamese, half this.... Half and half just sounds really clean” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017). She rejected the option of splitting her time between groups, and composed a new story to live by of, “*I’m not half anything. I’m a whole*”. She shifted to thinking of herself as part white and part Asian, “Things just fit together. You have different parts of a puzzle, but all together it makes a whole puzzle. It’s just hard splitting up your identities” (Nicole, research conversation, May 12, 2017). Nicole engaged in “an active reflection that attempt[ed] to put the whole thing together . . . in which a new vision of life, of oneself, and of one’s future projects and prospects requires a break with and reinterpretation of one past” (Carr, 1986, pp. 75-76). This restorying of her racial identity pushes against stories of race as singular and discrete. The composition of this new story to live by as a “whole person” fitting her identities together, communicates a lesser degree of tension and allowed her to achieve some narrative coherence.

While Nicole has expressed annoyance and frustration, she storied her experiences around race and multiple racial heritages as relatively “pleasant” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017) when compared to experiences of other persons of color that she knows. She attributes her experience to the comments made towards her as being not “really hateful . . . nothing that would make me cry . . . just

more annoying” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017). I wonder why Nicole’s experiences have been relatively pleasant when Breanna and Maylynn tell a different story. Perhaps the answer resides in Nicole’s interpretation and reaction to such experiences. She may simply be more tolerant, which may be associated with her *you can’t control them; you can control how you react* familial narrative. Or it may be that the tenor of the comments directed at Nicole are quite different than those directed at Maylynn and Breanna. If so, I once again wonder why? It may be linked to Nicole’s physical appearance. While her physical body does mark her as non-white others find it difficult to compose a story of her racial heritages. This creates an invisibility (which I will discuss further in Thread 4) that might inhibit the ability on the part of others to connect her to stories based on racial stereotypes (Mahiri, 2017, p. 162). Mahiri (2017) spoke to “identity contingencies . . . [that are] linked to how people are socially constructed” (p. 162). Mahiri (2017) indicated, “the complexions of their skin, the color of their hair and eyes, and their height . . . can color what people see and result in inequitable penalties for some and unearned privileges for others” (pp. 162-163). Nicole may, because of her physical appearance, be afforded privileges that include more “pleasant” experiences of being a person with multiple racial heritages.

However, her experience at the Colors of MWU retreat was a moment where she experienced a liminal space that provided an opportunity for her to compose a story in which she achieved some narrative coherence. To live out that story more fully, she conceived of and was instrumental in the creation of MRMC, a campus organization that acknowledges and values the complexities and multiplicities of persons with multiple racial heritages.

Breanna and Nicole experienced liminality as stories others composed about them around race bumped against the stories they told about themselves. These bumpings often arose because having multiple racial heritages does not neatly fit within dominant narratives around race, which often include a construction of race as a set of singular and discrete categories. In an attempt to place Breanna and Nicole into racial categories others often looked to their physical bodies, which led others to compose and tell stories of Breanna and Nicole that bumped against their stories to live by. Being “betwixt and between” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 8) their own stories and the stories of others created experiences of liminality. Seeking narrative coherence moved them into a threshold experience in which they composed their new stories to live by around race. Breanna now stories herself as both white/American and Korean and Nicole now stories herself as a whole person made up of parts, like a puzzle. However, these new stories remain tentative, always subject to being recomposed again and again. As Breanna said, “I am still very much in the process of figuring myself out” (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018).

Thread 3: Composing Their Stories to Live By within School Stories

School stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) are stories told within schools about the people, policies and practices that inhabit those schools. They can be told through words and actions and expressed through what is present and not present, such as what is included in and excluded from the school curriculum. I use the term curriculum as “an account of teachers’ lives and children’s’ lives together in schools and classrooms” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392). In the school stories that those in schools tell, people are placed in relation to each other and dominant social narratives. Maylynn,

Breanna, and Nicole often told stories of how their stories to live by did not fit within school narratives and how they recomposed their stories to live by across contexts. In this thread I highlight Maylynn and Nicole.

Maylynn's school stories are entwined with what she perceives to be the dominant political orientation of the surrounding communities and the people within her school contexts. In what she stories as her very conservative, predominantly white "rural" elementary school, school stories told her she did not belong. These stories were sometimes overt racial jokes told by her peers, but they also came in the form of stories told through actions, as in adults characterizing those jokes as teasing, or in the lack of attention she received from her teachers. The depiction of racial jokes as teasing led Maylynn to believe that her teachers, "agreed with the joke" (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016). These microinsults, a type of microaggression constituted by "behavior/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity, and demean a person's racial heritage or identity" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278), told a story of Maylynn as "other". Maylynn felt racially marginalized in her school context. Also, sensing that she would have been ostracized had she told others about her sexuality, she pushed it down and labeled it and herself "nasty". She composed stories to live by around plotlines of self-repression and self-criticism, such as storying herself as "gross in character" (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017).

In her "world" (Lugones, 1987) in elementary school, Maylynn lacked a sense of "ease" (Lugones, 1987). She was aware of the norms around race, gender, and sexuality, and complied with those norms for self-protection, but they bumped against her stories to live by. The racially charged "jokes" likely gave rise to feeling she didn't belong while at

school, and having multiple racial heritages meant that the majority of her peers did not share a common history with her. She could not fully express herself, and she hid her sexuality, by attempting to “erase it” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017). In Maylynn’s experiences in her “world” (Lugones, 1987) of school, school stories lived and told around race and sexuality bumped against her stories to live by creating experiences of liminality for her. Maylynn expressed this liminality through her words, “Where do I go?” “Which do I belong with?” (Interim Research Text, Maylynn, May 20, 2017). She became adept at identifying who might and might not be welcoming of her. She attributed this ability to listening to the familial curriculum making of her father and Yaya regarding people she should avoid based on their appearance (e.g. wearing hunting gear) and their conversations (e.g. around guns and other weaponry). This may have been an attempt on Maylynn’s part to feel more “at ease” (Lugones, 1987) in her elementary school context.

With her family’s relocation to what Maylynn stories as a less conservative community, she experienced a shift in the social contexts of her schools. During her eighth grade and high school years she felt, “there were people like me. Of course it’s still majority white . . . just a lot more of an accepting atmosphere” (Maylynn, research conversation, November 29, 2016). While Maylynn felt that she still did not completely fit in, her movements to new school contexts became spaces of liminality for her that brought opportunities to recompose her stories to live by. She was able to be more authentically expressive of her stories to live by, because she was allowed to “speak without persecution” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017). Maylynn began to play with composing and living out (Carr, 1986) stories to live by around race in

an effort to achieve greater narrative coherence. For a time she lived within an emo subculture, what she characterized as “goth, but more indie . . . also very white centric” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017). And, as she entered high school she storied herself as multiracial.

Maylynn’s stories to live by within school stories were composed next to racialized stories of her physical body told by her peers. In dominant stories of racial categorization, the color and texture of Maylynn’s hair and her facial features often mark her as black. However, her light skin tone does not fit within that narrative. Some of her white peers storied themselves as, “I’m darker than you are” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017). As Pilcher (2016) asserted, “others ‘see’, interpret and interact with us via our bodies” (p. 766). Maylynn’s peers interpreted her body as not fitting with their understanding of what it means to be black. As I discussed in Thread 2, our bodies can be imprecise markers of our racial heritages and stories to live by around race.

Comments like “I’m darker than you” are microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2011) that not only nullify Maylynn’s black heritage, but also deny her experiences (Nadal et al., 2011) as a person with multiple racial heritages. Maylynn’s response, “Great, thank you. That means you must be partially black and not me” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017) communicates her frustrations with the lack of understanding on the part of her peers regarding the “realities and experiences” (Nadal et al., 2011, p. 40) of persons with multiple racial heritages. Even though Maylynn found a sense of belonging and acceptance in her middle and high school contexts, she still heard stories that placed her on the margins and brought forth, to varying degrees, a sense that

she did not fit in. Within these experiences Maylynn experienced moments of liminality as stories composed and told by her peers around the racialization of her body bumped against her shifting stories to live by. Across time Maylynn has storied herself as “other”, and then “more black”, and then “more white”, and at times “an unidentified race”, and as our research conversations came to a close, she storied herself as “more black than white” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017). She explained, “It is a dual identity and it just flows back and forth” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017). These shifting stories to live by may be part of her struggle to compose and live out (Carr, 1986) narratively coherent stories around race.

Also, while in that relatively less conservative high school context, Maylynn was able to restory her sexuality, “I didn’t come out to myself until I was 16” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017). Maylynn named herself pansexual and began to publicly live out this story through her chosen community (Lindemann Nelson 1995: 2001). When with her friends in her chosen community, she “world” –travels (Lugones, 1987), and becomes “a performer . . . [and] put[s] on the fishnets and tell[s] lewd stories” (Maylynn, research conversation, March 16, 2017). Maylynn is not pretending to be a different person; she becomes a different person who authentically and openly lives her stories of sexuality. For Maylynn, putting on fishnet stockings is a metaphor for expressing her sexuality, and she understands her metaphorical wearing of fishnets as an act of resistance (Maylynn, research conversation, September 15, 2017) against dominant narratives around sexuality. This act of resistance may have been part of her struggle for narrative coherence, to live out (Carr, 1986) her chosen stories to live by of being a “queer woman of color” (Maylynn, research conversation, December 14, 2016).

Nicole told school stories that excluded her stories to live by as a person with multiple racial heritages. In elementary and middle school, her Vietnamese heritage was only relevant to the school curriculum during discussions about the Vietnam War, but she felt objectified, not included, when looked upon as a source of information about a topic outside her lived experiential knowledge of Vietnamese heritage and culture. Nicole also expressed frustration that stories of people having multiple racial heritages were absent except during discussions of slavery and the Civil War. Her first experience of this occurred during fifth grade social studies class. She storied the discussion as unfortunate because “it took that long to get there . . . [and] being mixed was a product of an . . . unwanted event. There was a negative being a mixed child” (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016). This story was not reflective of her experiences as a person with multiple racial heritages. For children to feel affirmed and accepted in their schools and classrooms, it is important that “interracial families and multiracial children...be presented as valid family models” (Kato, 2000, p. 39), and multiracial and “biracial students should see themselves in the curriculum through famous biracial or multiracial historical individuals...as well as more contemporary ones” (Baxley, 2008, p. 232).

In Nicole’s experience, the school curriculum almost exclusively presented white stories, but it was in learning about Martin Luther King, Jr. that she realized that when school stories were not white stories they were usually stories of black people. There was “just a huge group of people were missing from history in school. So, I was like, ‘Where do I fit?’” (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016). School stories that drew on the normativity of white stories bumped against Nicole’s stories to live by creating

experiences of liminality for her. In her struggles for narrative coherence, Nicole asked, “What am I?” This is not so much a question of her identity, of *who* she is, but a question of what her body signifies and how that fits in the stories told at school. She was struggling with choosing a story to “live up to” (Carr, 1986) within the social context of school. In this struggle she chose to “live out” (Carr, 1986) two familial narratives, *you can’t control them, you can only control how you react and education is important*. Rather than focusing on, and being frustrated by, the school stories told and not told her parents urged her to “do well in school. . . . [and] stay focused on that” (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016).

At MWU Nicole found the welcoming, accepting, validating space of the Vietnamese Student Association. When in that context she travelled to that “world” (Lugones, 1987) and became her Vietnamese self. In this chosen community (Lindemann Nelson, 1995; 2001) she felt she belonged; her stories to live by fit with the stories lived and told by others in that community. However, her membership in other MWU organizations again brought forth the recognition that she, a person with multiple racial heritages, is often not represented in dominant social structures and within her school contexts. This became vividly apparent when she experienced the lack of a space for persons with multiple racial heritages within the structure of the Colors of MWU retreat, but it was within that experience of liminality that Nicole restored her answer to the “What am I?” question. She composed a story of her body as part white and part Vietnamese rather than “half and half” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017). At the same time, she composed a new story to live by around “who” she is by declaring, “I’m a whole person” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017).

Through the telling and living of these newly composed stories around what and who she is, Nicole's struggle for narrative coherence was achieved, at least for a time.

For Maylynn and Nicole, narratives around race and the social construction of race were part of their school stories and part of their school curriculum making. School stories, often made visible through microaggressions, sometimes bumped against or left no space for their stories to live by, and school places became liminal spaces for each of them. In their struggles to achieve narrative coherence they sometimes brought familial narratives into their school stories. Other times, it was a shift in context, such as to a new school or a chosen community, that created spaces in which they could compose and live out (Carr, 1986) stories with greater narrative coherence.

Thread 4: Composing Their Stories to Live By in Spaces of Invisibility

I understand spaces of invisibility as spaces in which a person's stories to live by are not recognized or acknowledged by others. A person may create spaces of invisibility, for the purposes of self-protection, by composing and living secret stories or cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Secret stories are lived and told in "safe place[s], generally free from scrutiny" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 13), and cover stories are lived and told over other stories to make us more acceptable in dominant or normative narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Living in a space of invisibility brings a sense that others, whether in close personal relationship or within broader society, do not see you. Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole told stories of experiencing invisibility of their stories to live by as persons with multiple racial heritages.

Fifty years ago, in *Loving v. Virginia*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional, yet, according to Onwuachi-Willig &

Willig-Onwuachi (2009), “our society does not necessarily recognize and acknowledge interracial and multiracial couples and families in all aspects of life” (pp. 237-238). Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi (2009)—“a black woman and white man who are married . . . with . . . three children” (p. 232) assert, “we have seen in our own lives, our interraciality tends to make our very existence as a couple invisible” (pp. 238-239) and “when we are out in public, together or separately, our children often are not presumed to be ours” (p. 239). Multiracialness seems to have gained in visibility since Onwuachi-Willig and Willig-Onwuachi were writing ten years ago. However, stories of experience told by Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole express the invisibility of having multiple racial heritages.

When told, “Oh, I totally forget you’re Asian sometimes, because you just act so white,” (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016), Nicole experienced the invisibility of her multiple racial heritages. Comments such as this are microaggressions of exclusion and isolation, and people who make such statements are “questioning [the] authenticity” (Nadal et al., 2011, p. 40) of her multiple racial heritages. She also experienced spaces of invisibility when people “guessed” her racial heritage as “Hawaiian, Italian, Egyptian, Mexican, Hispanic, Turkish, Middle Eastern, Moroccan, Filipino” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017), all of which are incorrect, and all of which are singular. These microaggressions misidentify and assume a monoracial identity (Nadal et al., 2011), and are “invalidating because one’s true identities are not being honored or recognized” (Nadal et al., 2011, p. 41). Nicole told of experiencing the invisibility of her multiple racial heritages with these words, “no one ever thought I could be a mix” (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017).

Nicole felt that others frequently attempted to place her in a metaphorical racial “box”, a box that expressed a socially constructed understanding of race as a set of singular and discrete categories, and “being monoracial is the norm” (Nadal et al., 2011, p. 40). Nicole’s experience at the Colors of MWU retreat revealed the institutionalization of that social construction. As I have discussed, this retreat was a moment of liminality that opened a space for her to recompose her stories to live by around race and live out (Carr, 1986) her retold story through the creation of MRMC. The creation of MRMC pushed against the institutionalized invisibility of multiple racial heritages on the MWU campus. The creation of MRMC increased the visibility of Nicole’s multiple racial heritages. It also increased the visibility of multiple racial heritages within the structures of her university.

The invisibility of Breanna’s multiple racial heritages is intimately connected to the invisibility of being adopted. She told of the “lingering stigma...a sort of taboo, ‘we should not speak of this’ type of thing” (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018) around adoption and international adoption. Since her body marks her as Asian, it is likely people assume her parents are also Asian. Even when others become aware of her white adoptive family, they assume she has a single racial heritage—Asian. She expressed this invisibility during our first research conversation telling me, “Thank you for acknowledging that I’m white, because nobody ever really does that. I’ll be like, ‘I’m pretty white.’ Most are like, ‘Yeah, you’re not white’” (Breanna, research conversation, November 7, 2016). These words, like words that tell Nicole she “acts white” are microaggressions that express an “assumption of monoracial identity invalidating true identities” (Nadal et al., 2011, p. 41). Such comments reveal that the speaker is

judging Breanna as not *being* white based on the “social interpretation of pigmentation or melanin” (Alexander, 2004, p. 655). This makes invisible her multiple racial stories to live by as well as her performance of whiteness that she has learned as a member of her white family.

As I discussed in Thread 2, Breanna’s experiences growing up with white parents who composed a story of “racial neutrality” (Twine, 1997, p. 222) created a space in which she learned to perform whiteness and storied herself as white. It seems that experiencing the interactions of *being* Asian (having a body that racially marks her as Asian) and *performing* whiteness have enabled Breanna to compose stories to live by as a person with multiple racial heritages. This is invisible to others, and their lack of acknowledgment and acceptance of her multiple racial heritages creates experiences of liminality. In her struggle for narrative coherence, Breanna sometimes attempts to make her relationship with her mother visible to others. For example, when placing her order at a restaurant she might ask her mother, “Mom, what should we get?” (Breanna, research conversation, February 16, 2017), so the wait staff can hear her. By publicly naming her white mother “Mom”, she is claiming her multiple racial heritages and making them visible. Breanna is struggling to live out (Carr, 1986) a story that is narratively coherent, for at least a brief moment in time. However, there are no smooth and simple stories of making her multiple racial heritages visible, not only to those who Breanna meets in her day-to-day life, but also to herself. She is not sure she “will ever feel completely at home in one culture/identity, even in that which is my own personal blend of Korean and white” (Breanna, email correspondence, February 16, 2018).

Although Maylynn stories herself as racially ambiguous, she also knows that she is not “completely white passing” (Maylynn, research conversation, February 9, 2017). Her hair texture racially marks her as black, however her light skin tone marks her as “not black”. Her physical appearance seems to tell a story of having multiple racial heritages. For Maylynn, her story of invisibility around her multiple racial heritages was composed by her Yaya in her decision that Maylynn should straighten her hair to “look more like a white girl. This cover story of passing as white was Yaya’s attempt to make Maylynn’s black heritage, and therefore her multiple racial heritages, invisible. Yaya was attempting to create a space in which Maylynn’s stories to live by around her multiple racial heritages were not recognized within her elementary school.

Maylynn, however, experienced the living out (Carr, 1986) of that story of invisibility to be inauthentic. As she moved away from her conservative “rural” elementary school to a more accepting environment, she struggled to create greater narrative coherence. Maylynn played with multiple stories to live by around race, naming herself “other”, “more black”, “more white”, “multiracial”, “an unidentified race”, and “more black than white”. Maylynn also discontinued straightening her hair, which increased the visibility of her multiple racial heritages.

For Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole dominant cultural narratives and normative views of race created spaces of invisibility in which their stories to live by around multiple racial heritages were not acknowledge or recognized by others. Their experiences of moments of liminality brought opportunities to compose and live out (Carr, 1986) new or retold stories in their struggles for greater narrative coherence. These stories were often lived and told in ways that made their multiple racial heritages visible.

Thread 5: Composing Their Stories to Live By within Intergenerational Familial Narratives

Intergenerational familial narratives are stories of experience lived, told, relived, and retold across generations within a family. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained, “day-by-day experiences . . . are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative” (p. 19). All experiences have a past, present, and future; life is “experienced on a continuum” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19), and in families that continuum is intergenerational. Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole told stories of intergenerational familial narratives that shaped their stories to live by. In this thread I have chosen to highlight Maylynn and Nicole.

Maylynn’s Yaya was neglected as a child and abused by her husband; in response Yaya composed a story of *self-transformation for survival*. These experiences and the composition of that story became part of Yaya’s continuum of experiences. When Yaya came to know that Maylynn was being subjected to racist jokes and not being supported by her teachers in her elementary school, Yaya likely moved backward to her own experiences of abuse and neglect and relived her story of *self-transformation for survival*. She retold this story to Maylynn through her decision that Maylynn should straighten her hair to look “more like a white girl”. This story became part of Maylynn’s continuum of experiences. Maylynn found the living out (Carr, 1986) of that story to be inauthentic as it bumped against her stories to live by. In response to her experience of liminality associated with presenting herself inauthentically, and in her struggle for greater narrative coherence, Maylynn returned (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) to the intergenerational story of *self-transformation for survival* and once again transformed

herself, this time by discontinuing the straightening of her hair. Maylynn has also lived out (Carr, 1986) the *self-transformation for survival narrative* as she recomposed her stories to live by around her sexuality. She transformed herself from a child afraid to live and tell her story of pansexuality into a young woman openly living and telling her stories to live by as a “queer woman of color”. Again, living inauthentically created an experience of liminality for her that moved Maylynn to recompose her stories to live by in her struggle to achieve narrative coherence.

As Maylynn composed and recomposed stories to live by she has also restored the *self-transformation for survival narrative*. She pushed back against transforming herself as a means through which she might fit into dominant narratives around race and sexuality and storied her intergenerational familial narrative as a strategy for living more authentically and with greater narrative coherence.

Nicole’s parents lived and told an *education is important* familial narrative that includes stories of focusing on goals and doing well in school. This familial narrative is situated within intergenerational familial narratives lived and told on both sides of her extended family. Nicole stories her parents as “very scholastic” (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016). They both attended MWU for their undergraduate degrees, and Maylynn’s mother holds a doctoral degree in nursing. Nicole’s paternal grandmother “was one of the first women to graduate from MWU” (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016), and all her mother’s siblings have college degrees.

While in elementary and middle school, school stories bumped against Nicole’s stories to live by as she experienced the invisibility of her multiple racial heritages and felt unrepresented in the school curriculum. Nicole experienced liminality as she felt

objectified by the focus upon her and her Vietnamese heritage when the curriculum included the Vietnam War but excluded other elements of her Vietnamese heritage. In Nicole's experience, there was "just a huge group of people missing" (Nicole, research conversation, December 29, 2016) from school stories, and she wondered where she fit. The bumping of Nicole's stories to live by around her multiple racial heritages and school stories created an experience of liminality. In her struggles for narrative coherence Nicole turned to her parents for guidance, and they told her a familial narrative – *you cant' control them; you can control how you react*. Through their focus on her success in school (as lived through their consistent encouragement and assistance with her homework), they also retold and relived the *education is important* narrative. Her parents' retelling and reliving of the *education is important* narrative situated Nicole's experiences with the continuum of experiences of her family across generations, and shaped the composing of her stories to live by as a person who does well in school and stays focused, because she has "a goal to attain" (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016). This story to live by became Nicole's answer to her question, "Where do I fit?" within school stories. It was a story that she could live out (Carr, 1986) in her struggle for narrative coherence.

As reflected in Nicole's reliance on her parents' advice, Nicole's *education is important* intergenerational familial narrative is nested within the *family first* narrative lived and told across generations, "that's everything my parents always said, family first. All you really have is family" (Nicole, research conversation, December 12, 2016). Nicole's parents lived this narrative by staying in close relationship with family members on both sides of their extended families. When she was with her father's side of the

family they went camping, fishing, and horseback riding. When she was with her mother's side of the family they joined in "family get-togethers where there was . . . Vietnamese food piled high . . . just rowdy extended family everywhere" (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016). Nicole's immediate family frequently went on outings together to parks, zoos, and sporting events. Nicole storied herself as having "three different cultures I was kind of living in" (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016). Living these three cultures is embedded in the reliving and retelling of the *family first* intergenerational familial narrative.

Nicole highly values her Vietnamese heritage and culture; it is part of her stories to live by. Living her Vietnamese culture contextualizes her stories of experience "within a longer-term historical narrative" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). This contextualization is relevant not only to her past and present, but also an imagined future in which she might have children of her own, "being Vietnamese is part of me, so I want my kids to know" (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017). However, Nicole recognizes that living, retelling, and reliving her Vietnamese culture will become more and more difficult as her life takes her further and further away from it. She does not want to let it go, "but we're not exposed to [it] that much and there's really no need for us to do it in this society" (Nicole, research conversation, November 26, 2016). She wonders if she will be able to continue to live her Vietnamese heritage and retell and relive these familial cultural narratives with her own children. Imagining her future children, she speculates that they will likely be an "even smaller part Vietnamese" (Nicole, research conversation, February 19, 2017) than she, and she wonders, "Do I just let it go because they probably won't look Vietnamese at all?" (Nicole, research conversation, February

19, 2017). This experience of cultural assimilation bumps against Nicole's intergenerational familial narrative that places *family first* creating an experience of liminality. Nicole is struggling for narrative coherence by attempting to compose a story in which she can live up (Carr, 1986) to the *family first* narrative that connects her family across generations, but also one she can live out (Carr, 1986) within U.S. society. Imagining possible stories to live by may provide her more narrative coherence.

Maylynn and Breanna's stories of experience and stories to live by are nested within intergenerational familial narratives. As they experienced liminality, for example when school stories bumped against their stories to live by, intergenerational stories shaped the stories they composed and lived out (Carr, 1986) in their struggles for narrative coherence.

Tentativeness

As I discussed in Thread 5, life is experienced "on a continuum" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19); all experiences have a past, present, and future. Stories of experience and stories to live by are always shifting, always being recomposed, and always tentative, therefore, narrative inquirers do not set out to identify the essence of an experience or make generalizations. We enter into stories of experience to gain insight into the particularities of individual experiences, to see people in their wholeness, and attend "to what is possible in understanding the temporal, social, and place dimensions within an ongoing life" (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 391).

Chapter 8: Learnings, Imaginings, and Wonderings

I began this inquiry with concerns about my grandson's possible future experiences in social contexts beyond his family; these concerns became the personal justification for this research. On the practical level, I hoped to aid teachers in their efforts to know and understand their students with multiple racial heritages thus leading them to insights as to how to better teach their students. I also hoped to contribute to theoretical insight around racial identity development of individuals with multiple racial heritages. I imagined that greater knowledge and understanding could lead to creating more socially just spaces for individuals with multiple racial heritages. It is to these beginnings that I now return.

Personal Justifications

Through every phase of the inquiry I have found myself becoming more and more aware of my stories of race and stories to live by as a white person in U.S. society. I felt tensions rising in myself as I identified biases and behaviors that I wished to change in my thinking and my life. For example, when Nicole spoke of not being represented in the curriculum and curriculum materials in her school contexts, I recognized that I have been guilty of creating such contexts for some of my students. I also came face-to-face with childhood experiences that taught me to fear those who are different from me. I know I still struggle, to varying degrees, with fear of those I see as different than me. I believe I have conquered it intellectually, but sometimes I still feel those fears in my body.

I have gained in awareness about Omari's possible future experience as a person with multiple racial heritages. School stories and dominant social narratives may take the form of microaggressions that exclude and invalidate him, rendering him, his stories to

live by, and his multiple racial heritages invisible. It is likely he will experience liminality as his stories to live by bump against school stories and dominant social narratives. He may look to his familial narratives and intergenerational familial narratives as he struggles to compose and live out (Carr, 1986) narratively coherent stories. He may experience situations in which he might compose cover stories and tell secret stories for self-protections. He may “world” – travel (Lugones, 1987), becoming a different person as he moves across social contexts, in order feel a sense of belongingness.

As Omari’s grandmother, as an educator, and a member of my community, my growing awareness of experiences and stories to live by of persons with multiple racial heritages has brought me, what Greene (1977) names as, a wide-awakeness that I did not previously have. This wide-awakeness is accompanied by a moral responsibility to act on what I know. It is not enough to know without changing how I respond in the worlds in which I live. In response, I have made it a priority to speak openly with my undergraduate education students about issues of diversity. My goal is to assist them in expanding their understandings and to encourage them to examine their own experiences, thinking, and biases. For example, during a class discussion about meeting the needs of diverse students, one of my students, a young white woman, commented that it is her hope to treat all of her future students as members of the human race. Her comments reminded me of the *race does not matter* narrative lived and told within Breanna’s home. I pointed out that while I understood her intention, the lived experiences of some of her students will likely not be present within that view. I encouraged her, and her fellow students, to work toward building relationships with their students and their families, to come to understandings of their students’ experiences, and examine their own beliefs and

experiences around the concept of race. I explained that these understandings will assist them with seeing their students as individuals and aid them in curriculum making that will meet their students' needs.

In my personal life, my husband and I have joined a new church community. We have left the predominantly white, middle class, suburban parish where we have been members for over 30 years; we feel we no longer fit within that community. It is a context that does not reflect our appreciation of and respect for diversity. We joined a highly diverse (racially, ethnically, economically) church community situated in the urban core; we feel we belong. When I am with Omari and his parents in public I feel a responsibility to affirm him and interact with him in a manner that makes his relationship to his parents and me visible, thus making his multiple racial heritages visible. I learned this from Breanna's story of naming her mother "Mom", so that others understand their relationship.

Social Justifications

The theoretical.

Currently, racial identity development for individuals with multiple racial heritages is often theoretically expressed through ecological models of racial identity, which assume multiple healthy identities. For example, Root (2003a), drawing upon two studies (Root, 1990; 1998) described five possible identity "types", Rockquemore (1998) identified four possible identity categories in her study of persons with black/white heritages. In their Canadian study, Lou and Lalonde (2015) expanded on Rockquemore's work by including persons with Black/White, East Asian/White, South Asian/White, and Latino/White heritages, and again found four possible identity categories. In

combination, the theory and research around identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages reflects an understanding that there is a “wide variation in ways individuals understand and respond to their multiracialism . . . [and] racial identities can be fluid and dynamic according to immediate context rather than adhering to fixed immutable categories (Harris & Sim, 2002; Shih & Sanchez, 2009)” (Lou and Lalonde, 2015, p. 86). The stories to live by around race told by Maylynn, Breanna, and Nicole seem to support these findings and theoretical perspective. For example, one might look to Lou and Lalonde (2015) and view Breanna’s stories to live by around race as an “unvalidated border identity . . . as biracial, but other people may not accept [her] as biracial” (p. 87). Or, one might look to Rockquemore (1998) and view Maylynn’s stories to live by as a protean identity, because she sees herself as able “to cross boundaries between Black, White, and biracial” (p. 201).

Knowing these categories and assigning these labels may provide some insights into how persons with multiple racial heritages might story their racial identities. However, this knowledge does little to aid in understanding the complex, multifaceted experiences of persons with multiple racial heritages across time and in multiple contexts. What the theoretical models, even with an acknowledgement that racial identity shifts over time and across context, do not and cannot represent are the particularities, complexities, and ongoingness of racial identity development. While the ecological models of racial identity development make visible many possible racial identities, they are still categorical “boxes”, and assume an identity resolution, even if it be temporary.

My contribution to the theory around racial identity development for persons with multiple racial heritages—specifically young women—indicates that there is no identity

resolution. There are multiple moments of identity making. Identity making is an ongoing, never finished process nested in changing narratives around race (often told through school stories), familial narratives, and intergenerational narratives across multiple and changing contexts. This creates multiple experiences of liminality and struggles for narrative coherence. In those struggles, “what is at stake on the plane of ‘life’ is my own coherence as a self, the unity and integrity of my personal identity” (Carr, 1986, p. 96). Narrative coherence is never completely achieved, and stories to live by, including those around race, are always being composed and recomposed. We are, a Maxine Greene (1995) writes, always in the making. We see this in profound ways with the young women in this study.

Social justice concerns.

As Omari approaches his fourth birthday his awareness of the world is expanding rapidly. He is fascinated with vehicles of almost any kind: cars, trucks, busses, construction vehicles, and so forth. He names them, counts them, and identifies them by their colors; in other words he is learning to identify, quantify, and categorize, which are all important and valuable skills both intellectually and practically. My daughter told me a story of one of Omari’s efforts to refine those skills. While she was asking him to name colors of different objects, he pointed to her arm and asked, “What color is you?” She asked if he meant her skin color; he said, “Yes”. She told him that her skin is cream color. Then he asked the color of his father’s skin, to which she replied “Chocolate”. His skin, she told him, is caramel colored. Omari then went on to ask about why his father does not have hair, why his father is big, and he is small. All of these questions were

simple wonderings about the world he sees, and to him, the answers hold no particular social value.

This inquiry, however, vividly illustrated that society ascribes value to a person's physical appearance, and that physical appearance is often used to assign people to racial categories placing people in metaphorical racial "boxes". Society, specifically white society, has spent a great deal of time and effort constructing and maintaining racial "boxes" causing great damage to those placed in "undesirable boxes". It is my view that racial "boxes" are fundamentally unjust, because they render people and their complex and multiple stories to live by invisible. These boxes bring with them dominant and normative stories of race, which can be expressed, through single story (Adichie, 2009) stereotypes, microaggressions, and lack of representation in social contexts, such as schools. Dominant stories of race and racial categories have the power to marginalize, which can result in lack of access to social and economic resources.

This inquiry has shown that being categorized as a member of a racial "box" may lead a person to compose and live out (Carr, 1986) cover stories, such as attempting to pass for white by straightening one's hair or applying cosmetics to one's eyes, for survival or self-protection. One might also choose to make some stories to live by, stories that may be deemed unacceptable by others, into secret stories told only in safe places, as when Breanna hid stories she was composing around her Korean heritage from her mother. Composing and living cover stories and secret stories can bring feelings of being forced to live inauthentically, which is socially unjust.

Practical Justifications

Policy considerations.

Dominant and normative stories around race and racial categories have the potential to create significant challenges in the lives of persons with multiple racial heritages within their school and classroom contexts. To address this situation we must enter into long-term and considered conversations in which we interrogate the racial “boxes” that exist within society and educational institutions. We must ask who benefits and who suffers from the existence and use of these boxes? The conversation must include how high-stakes testing data that is disaggregated by racial categories impacts curricular and instructional decisions made at administrative and classroom levels. We must look at the “boxes” themselves and ask if they should or should not be used, and if so, which “boxes”, how many, and why? These conversations must also include the stories of those who must decide which “boxes” to check for themselves or their children. How does the action of checking a box on a form, an action that reflects a self-designation into a racial “box”, bump against and shape stories to live by of families and children? We must inquire into experiences of liminality and struggles for narrative coherence lived and relived by these families and children.

I submit that these conversations must be had across all levels of our educational institutions, from preschools through college and university level programs, including teacher preparation programs. We must converse with pre-service and in-service teachers, building level and district level administrators, and policy makers, such as local school boards, and federal and state departments of education. These conversations must also be

entered into with state legislators who debate school funding formulas that allocate monies to public school district across their states.

These conversations should also include the lack of diversity in many public schools and classrooms. The majority of the teaching force in the United States is white, and many schools remain racially segregated. This situation perpetuates the belief in and use of racial “boxes”, because it excludes the particularities and complexities of stories of race. To attend to this issue, I imagine purposeful recruitment of minority students and students with multiple racial heritages into teacher preparation programs. The next step, of course, is for schools and school districts to hire teachers from a wide variety of racial heritages. Additionally, conversations must move beyond education policy to the examination of “trends in school economic segregation, which . . . shapes the school contexts and opportunities available to students” (Reardon & Owens, 2014, p. 200).

Each of us, in our particular capacities and contexts within the field of education, must take up these conversations. For example, as a current and future teacher educator, I see myself having some of these conversations with students within discussions of diversity, access to educational resources, and curriculum making. If I am able to make a positive impact on my students’ willingness and ability to deconstruct racial “boxes” in their thinking and teaching practice, then my individual efforts will positively impact the lives of many of their students. I also stand in a moment of uncertainty as I consider other actions of moral responsibility I am called to as I move beyond this dissertation. I am in the process of composing that story.

Teaching practice.

Through this inquiry I have come to understand that for students with multiple racial heritages there is a potential for school stories to bump against their familial narratives and stories to live by. As I have discussed, these bumpings can create experiences of liminality, experiences in which students feel unsteady and uncertain about themselves and question if they belong. As the leader in the classroom who carries the responsibility of creating educative experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997) for each student, it is incumbent upon teachers to attend to and work to correct this situation. Therefore, teachers must carefully consider their curriculum making process, which, according to Schwab (1973), is the “coordination” (p. 509) of the four commonplaces of curriculum, the teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu (contexts).

To this accomplish this, teachers must begin with themselves; they must become awake to and reflexively inquire into their own stories, school stories, and dominant stories of race. They must also awaken to students’ stories and familial narratives, not only to know and understand their students’ out-of-school experiences, but also to awaken to places where school stories might support or bump against students’ stories and familial narratives. This calls forth the need for teachers to build relationships with students and families. Teachers may need to create opportunities for families and students to tell and live their stories within schools and classrooms. This new awakesness (Greene, 1977) brings a moral responsibility to recompose school stories (including those lived and told through subject matter, curriculum materials, and personal interactions) in ways that honor and respect their students with multiple racial heritages.

I recognize the challenges involved with realizing this vision. The necessary self-examination, reflection, relationship building, and curriculum making will require a great deal of mental and emotional energy, and a significant amount of time. This bumps against the dominant structure of schools in the United States that requires teachers to be responsible for a wide range of duties (such as instructional planning that includes differentiated instruction, preparation for high-stakes testing, field trip planning, implementation of health and wellness policies, emergency preparedness including active shooter training, and so forth) while being charged with classes of between twenty and thirty students. For middle school and high school teachers who teach up to seven classes a day, this can mean working to meet the needs of 150 to 200 or more students.

Even if teachers are unable to know the particular stories to live by and familial narratives of their students, they can work toward becoming more wakeful to students' experiences. Teachers can come to know the experiences of students with multiple racial heritages as they live within schools and classrooms. These factors include the possibility of being targets of microaggression that may include teasing or bullying, of feeling unrepresented and invisible in school stories, of feeling they do not belong, and struggling to live authentically in classrooms. Teachers should then ask themselves what this wakefulness calls them to do in their curriculum making so students with multiple racial heritages are welcomed, affirmed, included, and represented in their school experiences and school stories.

Wonderings

Looking to the future, I continue to wonder about the composing of stories to live by of individuals with multiple racial heritages as they move across time and contexts.

Each participant in this inquiry has brought forth wonderings that point to the need for future inquiries. Maylynn told stories of experiences that bring wonderings about the experiences and stories to live by of individuals who identify as having multiple racial heritages and as LGBTQIA+³⁷. Breanna told stories of experiences that bring wonderings about the experiences and stories to live by of interracial adoptees who identify as having multiple racial heritages. I wonder about the complexities and particularities of experiences, including experiences of liminality and struggles for coherence, that might be brought forth in narrative inquiries that look in these directions. Nicole's stories of feeling unrepresented in school curriculum bring wonders about teachers' curriculum making processes when teaching students with multiple racial heritages. I am reminded of a conversation I had with a friend who has taught many children with multiple racial heritages, but, prior to a conversation with me, she had not considered that family and school experiences of children with multiple racial heritages might be different from monoracial students. I wonder about the understandings that might come forth through a narrative inquiry with teachers who are working toward becoming more wakeful to the experiences of their students with multiple racial heritages. I wonder how this wakefulness might impact their relationship with students and their experiences of curriculum making.

When I entered this inquiry, I imagined three participants between the ages of 18 and 35 who self-identify as having multiple racial heritages. All three of the participants in this study being women was simply a result of who responded to my recruitment efforts. I have, on several occasions, thought of a conversation I had with another friend

³⁷ LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexuality, and "all other sexualities, sexes, and genders that are not included in these few letters" (LBGTQIA+ Info, 2018).

who has four children, two boys and two girls, with multiple racial heritages. She told of her boys having different experiences socially than her girls. I wonder if a narrative inquiry with participants who identify as male might bring forth understandings and complexities of experiences not revealed in this inquiry.

While I see the possibilities in all of the imagined inquiries I have described, I find myself focusing on the bumpings of familial narratives and school stories. Omari will begin attending preschool this fall, and I wonder about not only his experiences as he moves between his home and school contexts, but also the experiences of those who compose his familial narratives (specifically his parents) and those who will compose his school stories (specifically his teachers). I wonder about the understandings that might be gained through an inquiry in which the researcher would come alongside children with multiple racial heritages, their parents, and their teachers. I see such a narrative inquiry as building upon the work of Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2012), *Places of Curriculum Making: Narrative Inquiries into Children's Lives in Motion*, in which they came into relationship with families, children, and teachers as children moved between their home and school contexts. I wonder about how such an inquiry might help parents, grandparents, and teachers think about the experiences and stories to live by of children with multiple racial heritages. I also wonder how such an inquiry might assist parents, grandparents, and teachers in efforts to understand, support, and affirm children in their lives who have multiple racial heritages.

There is so much more to know and understand.

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Appendix A

Participants with Multiple Racial Heritages Needed for Educational Research

Research:

This study is an inquiry into the connection between experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages and their multiple identities. I am interested in understanding participants' experiences of family, society, and school and how these experiences interact across time and in various contexts in the creation and shaping of their identities.

Purpose of Research:

Through this research I hope to contribute to teachers' understanding of their students with multiple racial heritages so as to increase their ability to create culturally responsive learning environments, which includes their curricular and instructional decisions.

Potential Participants:

To participate in this study you must *self-identify* as a person with more than one racial heritage. You must be between 18 and 35 years of age and willing to share stories of your experiences with the researcher. Participants must be able to converse with the researcher in English.

Time Commitment:

Participants will meet one-on-one with the researcher once or twice a month over the course of six to eight months (approximately 10 meetings). Each meeting will last approximately one hour.

Benefits:

This study provides participants with the opportunity to contribute to the body of research that focuses on the experiences of persons with multiple racial heritages. The study has the potential to benefit participants indirectly (as members of society) as it aims to provide educators with insights into the intersection of inside-of-school and outside-of-school experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages, thereby increasing their ability to make appropriate and valuable curricular decisions.

Risks:

There are minimal risks (no more risk than what is related to daily life) associated with this study. As in daily life, there is the possibility of experiencing emotional discomfort, stress, or pain as a result of recalling and telling personal stories.

Researcher:

Mary Jo Gates, PhD Candidate
Department of Curriculum and Teaching
School of Education
University of Kansas



Appendix B

Sample Recruitment Email

Individuality and Multiplicity: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences and Stories to Live By of Individuals with Multiple Racial Heritages

Mary Jo Gates

Subject Line: Opportunity for Persons with Multiple Racial Heritages to participate in Educational Research

I am a doctoral candidate in the Curriculum and Teaching Department at the University of Kansas.

I am currently recruiting participants for a study that will examine the connection between experiences of individuals with multiple racial heritages and their multiple identities. I am interested in understanding participants' experiences of family, society, and school and how these experiences interact across time and in various contexts in the creation and shaping of their identities. Through this research I hope to contribute to teachers' understanding of their students with multiple racial heritages so as to increase their ability to create culturally responsive learning environments.

Participants must self-identify as a person with multiple racial heritages, be between the ages of 18 and 35, and be able to converse in English.

The study will take place over the course of approximately six to eight months with participants meeting with me one or twice a month—each meeting will last approximately one hour.

Participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the body of research that focuses on the experiences of persons with multiple racial heritages, with the possibility of benefiting students with multiple racial heritages and their teachers.

This study is considered to be of “minimal risk” to the participants with no more risk than is associated with daily life.

If interested please contact me at 913-980-0653 or mjgates@ku.edu

If you know someone who might be interested, please forward this email to that person.

Thank you,
Mary Jo Gates, M.A.
PhD Candidate
Department of Curriculum and Teaching
School of Education
University Of Kansas